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Forest industry applauds new thinking on bushfire prevention

Forest and forest product industries have applauded the Abbott Government for taking an innovative approach to fighting bushfires, which cost the industry hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost trees each summer.

Speaking at the forest industry Gala Dinner in Canberra on 25 March, the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, announced a \$1.5 million dollar project to conduct a series of trials to physically remove some shrubs, smaller trees and undergrowth from state forests rather than solely relying on burning off in winter.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Senator Richard Colbeck, said "There are a number of benefits from this practice as an alternative to controlled burning, including community concerns over air quality, not being limited by weather conditions and managing fuel loads that are close to built-up areas."

The Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Mr Ross Hampton said, "Hotter and more frequent fires driven by a changing climate are costing this nation dearly. The loss of native animals is devastating. Massive amounts of greenhouse gases go into the atmosphere when big fires get away from us. And of course we often lose hundreds of thousands of hectares of plantations or native forests. If it can be demonstrated that a sensible, sensitively managed reduction of the density of the bio-matter in key areas will reduce the intensity of mega-fires, this trial will be priceless. We are about a decade behind some other countries. The United States is halfway through a 10 year \$400 million similar programme and it is time we caught up. Last year AFPA commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to conduct a scoping study of biomass removal. That study found that, in locations close to cities, adding some mechanical removal to winter burn offs had a benefit cost ratio of 6 (p.4, DAE Report)," Mr Hampton said.

"AFPA looks forward to contributing to the project by participating in a Department of Agriculture working group".

Deloitte Access Economics (DAE) report: <http://www.ausfpa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/AFPA-DAE-report-Amended-Final-2014-05-27.pdf>

Statement from Senator Colbeck:

http://www.richardcolbeck.com.au/clients/richard/downloads/item790/260315_investing_in_bushfire_prevention_strategies.pdf

AFPA represents forest growers, harvesters, and manufacturers of timber and paper products.

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