



Tuesday 28 April 2020

AFPA submission to Royal Commission calls for new vision in managing Australia's 132 million-hectare native forest estate

The Australian Forest Products Association's (AFPA) submission to the Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements has called for an ambitious whole-of-landscape approach to bushfire mitigation and active land management, including mechanical fuel reduction alongside controlled burns to ensure we don't see a repeat of the Black Summer fires.

AFPA Chief Executive Ross Hampton said the fires wrought unprecedented damage to Australia's forest industries in terms of their breadth and severity, affecting both the native forest and plantation (softwood and hardwood) estates across the country, and it was vital that lessons were learned to prevent a repeat.

"Despite several catastrophic bushfire seasons around the country in the past 50 years, multiple state Royal Commissions and national inquiries, the unprecedented devastation across the country from this bushfire season has shown that business-as-usual is not an option," AFPA CEO Mr Ross Hampton said.

"We need a coordinated, whole of landscape, approach to land management, not the current system where there are multiple approaches to fuel reduction by multiple land managers and agencies. That approach should include using mechanical fuel reduction techniques to complement fuel reduction burns, which have proved highly effective in other bushfire prone countries."

AFPA's submission focuses on the need for improved land management regimes to mitigate against future catastrophic fires, the need for a greater focus from governments to protect forest industry assets, and a greater appreciation for the enormous fire mitigation, suppression and recovery role that the forest industry workforce provides.

"We urgently need more consistent and active land management across all land tenures to match the standards required on State managed public land tenures under a National Bushfire Mitigation Strategy," Mr Hampton said.

"This Royal Commission should examine how Australia can move towards national benchmarks for fuel reduction in strategic areas, and a close examination of how mechanical fuel reduction can complement hazard reduction burns in a national bushfire strategy."

"AFPA's submission also urges governments to treat timber plantations and timber processing facilities as critical infrastructure, and commensurate firefighting resources are prioritised to reduce the loss of plantations and processing capabilities to avoid an economic disaster for the region," Mr Hampton concluded.

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