

Friday 30 October 2020

Royal Commission recognises vital forest industries’ firefighting crews, and the importance of fuel reduction – including mechanical methods

The Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) welcomes the report of the Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements’ recognition of forest industry crews’ crucial role in firefighting.

"Private forestry industry brigades and farm fire units made a significant contribution during the 2019-2020 bushfires."

- Royal Commission report, p166

AFPA also welcomes the Royal Commission’s strong findings regarding the vital part fuel reduction must play and the need for more consistency across all land tenures.

"Fuel load management, including prescribed burning, can materially reduce the risk to settlements when undertaken in the wildland-urban interface.

- **Fuel load management in targeted areas in the broader landscape, away from the wildland-urban interface, can materially reduce the wildfire risk to settlements. The areas targeted for these purposes can include high ignition areas (eg high points in the landscape susceptible to lightning strikes), areas where the topography and forest types facilitate fire runs, ridges and other areas known to be associated with high intensity crown fires, and areas that are accessible for suppression and treatment activities.**
- **Fuel management can reduce bushfire-related impacts on ecological assets and areas of high conservation value.**
- **The amount of prescribed burning in the landscape (independent of the placement or arrangement of treatments) can materially affect the extent of bushfires."**

- Royal Commission report, p372

"Public land managers should clearly convey and make available to the public their fuel load management strategies, including the rationale behind them, as well as report annually on the implementation and outcomes of those strategies."

- Royal Commission report, p180

AFPA CEO Mr Ross Hampton said, "These findings are in line with our advocacy over many years pointing out that we must use all fuel reduction means at our disposal – cool burns and mechanical removal. We must not simply focus all attention on multi use forests. National Parks need to manage fuel loads, and farmers need to be given more flexibility to make their properties safe."

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In his evidence to the Royal Commission earlier this year, Mr Hampton told the Commission that deploying mechanical fuel reduction to create buffers around towns and critical infrastructure would make it easier to suppress catastrophic fires.

“The Royal Commission will be a wasted opportunity if we don’t, as a nation, become far more proactive in our approach to bushfire mitigation,” Mr Hampton said.

“Mechanical fuel reduction and thinning of the bush close to towns must play a greater role in fuel reduction. Otherwise we will go into another bushfire season and risk repeating the mistakes of the past,” Mr Hampton concluded.

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AFPA recently released a report, [Using Fire and Machines to Better Fire-Proof Our Country Towns](#). AFPA’s submission to the Royal Commission is available [here](#).

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