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## **Royal Commissions and Inquiries Consistently Recommend Fuel Reduction Burns in Native Forests be Increased. Why Do Government's Fail to Act?**

After the 1939 Victorian bushfires, the Royal Commission, chaired by Judge Stretton, reported:

*Controlled Burning.*—This consists of strip and patch. burning. The amount of this burning which was done was ridiculously inadequate.

In relation to the role of local councils he stated - Preventive work, generally by burning especially, is cheap and quickly carried out by a small staff.

*Burning.*—It has already been recommended that the Forests Commission must recognize the necessity of protective burning in its areas.

John Mulligan recalls the fire intensity in East Gippsland was significantly less than elsewhere in Victoria. The main reason was that the bush east of Orbost was still largely controlled by the Lands Department, who weren't concerned about burning being done by bush lease graziers. The map of the 1939 fires shows the burnt area in East Gippsland was much less than areas where the Forestry Commission generally stopped controlled burning, as it was thought it would affect timber quality.

<https://southeasttimberassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Fire-in-East-Gippsland-by-John-Mulligan.pdf>



A consistent theme in the House of Representatives report on the 2002-03 bushfires *A Nation Charred*, was evidence from many parts of Australia that the declining level of fuel reduction burning was a major contributor to the devastation of almost four million hectares of forest across southern Australia. The report also highlighted that fuel reduction burning was made more expensive and difficult due to changed legislative and regulatory requirements, relating to environmental requirements.



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The Victorian 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission Report noted: "Prescribed burning is one of the main tools for fire management on public land. It cannot prevent bushfire, but it decreases fuel loads and so reduces the spread and intensity of bushfires. By reducing the spread and intensity of bushfires, it also helps protect flora and fauna. Ironically, maintaining pristine forests untouched by fuel reduction can predispose those forests to greater destruction in the event of a bushfire.

Recommendation 56 of a total of 67 recommendations was "The State fund and commit to implementing a long-term program of prescribed burning based on an annual rolling target of 5 per cent minimum of public land."

*Other recommendations that should receive particular attention are those that governments have previously shown reluctance to implement, such as increased fuel-reduction targets.*

No surprise that the Victorian government has continued to show a reluctance to increase the area of forest subject to fuel reduction and after an initial increase, annual area treated has fallen away. At 30 June 2018, DELWP and its partners had completed 64,978 hectares of planned burning and further 9,750 hectares of mechanical treatment.

With 7.1 million hectares of public native forest in Victoria, this means barely one percent of the forested area is being treated. This is one fifth of the minimum recommended area. It is of little comfort to forest biodiversity and rural communities that a new generation computer model has calculated a bushfire residual risk for 2017-18 of 65 per cent, which is below the target of 70 percent. This academic theory, instead of fuel reduction ensures horrific fires will continue.

The area subject to fuel reduction has declined from 234,614 hectares in 2014-15 to 74,728 hectares in 2017-18, a reduction of 68 percent. So as has been the case for decades, hard lessons are quickly forgotten in the interests of inner city political expedience.

Unfortunately, the situation in NSW is no better, as fuel reduction between 2002-03 and 2017-18 on public land has declined by 74 percent. Over the past 30 years, it seems all fire agencies have moved from a risk reduction, to a disaster response approach to forest fire management. The head of the NSW RFS has stated: Prescribed burning "is no panacea when it comes to fire safety. It's no good chasing hectares, with broadscale burn-offs in remote areas."

Tens of millions of dollars are committed to large air tankers and millions more are poured into fire 'research.' This research is increasingly disconnected from the real world, as activist academics seek research findings that support a no burn wilderness agenda as farmers, rural communities and biodiversity pay a massive price.

**WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR GOVERNMENTS AND PUBLIC LAND MANAGERS TO COMMIT TO WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION TO TOWNS LIKE TATHRA, BY USE OF BROADSCALE FUEL REDUCTION BURNING?**



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