

# SouthEastTIMBERassociation

## **A Bipartisan Commitment to More Bushfire Mitigation is Needed, if NSW & Australia is to Avoid the Next Wave of Flora and Faunal Extinctions Caused by Repeated High Intensity Bushfires.**

On 15 November 2021, the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* was signed into law by President Biden. This was a Bipartisan Act and may be a model Australian jurisdictions need to follow, if we are to avoid the next wave of flora and faunal extinctions.

The new Act included a major investment of \$4.5 billion for federal wildland fire (bushfire) management efforts over the next five years.

Within the federal government, the Interior and Agriculture departments both administer bushfire programs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service will receive an additional \$3 billion through the Act.

The Interior Department will receive approximately \$1.5 billion for bushfire management over the next five years. Both departments will coordinate closely to maximize the benefits of the additional investments.

The Interior Department will reduce bushfire risk, improve ecosystem health and remove fuel for bushfires on additional areas, using an additional \$878 million.

Strategic plans are currently being developed to guide the implementation of this historic program. The significant investments in forest and rangeland restoration, hazardous fuel management, bushfire preparation, and post-wildfire recovery will be implemented as quickly and efficiently as possible.

One of the key initiatives, aside from increased fuel reduction burning, will be thinning of regrowth. The regrowth has resulted from the scrubbing up of forests due to less mild burning and the dense regrowth resulting from high intensity bushfires. Thinning is a key tool in restoring Australian forested landscapes. At the "every tree is precious" regulatory framework precludes ecological thinning in most national parks.

American forest managers and politicians seem to have a better understanding than most Australian politicians, public land managers and policy bureaucrats that a wilderness driven, lockup and hope for the best, approach to bushfire mitigation has been an abject failure, from biodiversity/forest health and human life and property perspectives.

NSW and Australian environmental regulatory frameworks are rooted in a wilderness (no need to manage) and terra nullius view, which denies the role of Aboriginal fire management in the development of the Australian biota over the past 50,000 years.

This framework must be rewritten to incorporate an active and adaptive approach to fire and biodiversity management. The precautionary principle must change from an excuse to do nothing, to a guide to progressively implement active and adaptive management across Australian natural landscapes.

### **Why is a bipartisan approach to sustainable forest management needed?**

The current environmental policy decision making process is dominated by a populist eco-political agenda driven by multiple, co-ordinated, eco-activist campaigns and consequently, the voting intentions of ill-informed members of the public. Government environmental decisions must be based on practical scientific research, not wilderness driven theoretical models, that ignore the Scientific Method.

The Scientific Method is a process which scientists use to try to investigate, verify, or construct an accurate and reliable version of any natural phenomena. The process should be done by creating an objective framework for the purpose of scientific inquiry and analysing the results scientifically, to come to a conclusion, which either supports or contradicts the observation made at the beginning.



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Environmental policy in Australia, is driven more by multimillion dollar activist charity campaigns and activist bureaucrats running eco-political agendas, than by ecologically sustainable management principles.

Those that choose to rewrite the history of Aboriginal burning prior to European arrival are a bigger threat to the future of Australia's native forests and biodiversity than the harvesting of a portion of those forests ever was or will be in future.

Unfortunately, activist academics and charities, with like-minded media promote the wilderness agenda and a declining number of true scientists, who provide research outputs that counter the minimalist burning agenda, are drowned out.

For example, ANU Paleoecologist, Professor Simon Haberle has analysed the sediments of the Bega Swamp, near Bemboka in southern NSW. Among other things, Professor Haberle found:

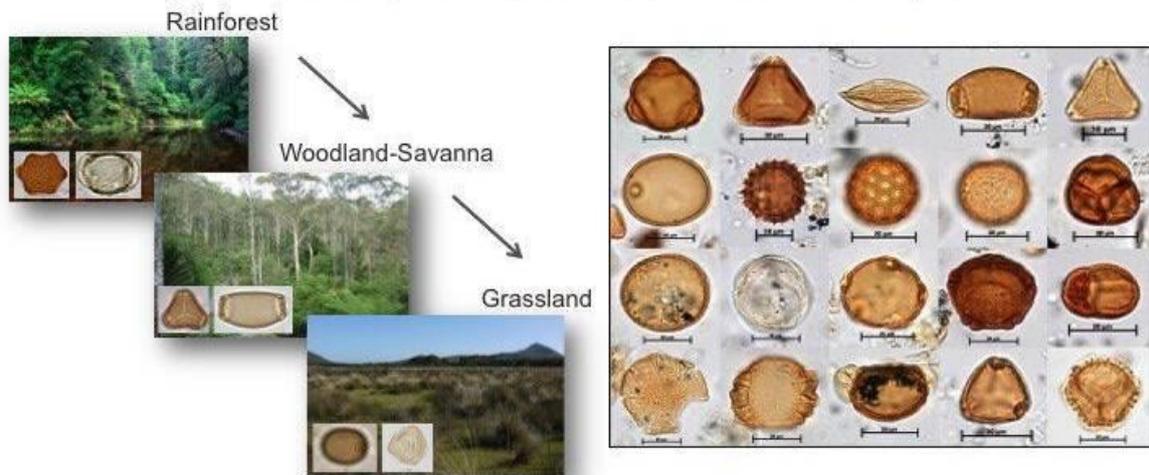
*The sediment, sampled at a very fine resolution, paints a picture of the landscape in freeze frames of every 20 years, stretching back over 15,000 years.*

*"The results show that the number of samples including charcoal has increased since European settlement, confirming other studies that big fires have occurred more frequently than during the time of Aboriginal land tenure in the Australian high country," Professor Haberle said.*

*"It also shows that in the past mega fires only occurred very rarely, once every 4000 years, and that the current situation of big and intense fires is unusual in the long-term history of the region."*

## The Science of Reconstructing Past Landscapes

We can identify different vegetation communities that existed in the past from pollen and other plant microfossils found in sediment samples



Picture: Australian National University

*You see big changes in fire management, because you can look at the charcoal and see what burning regime took place," he said.*

*"It was a regular regime, Aboriginal people knew how to keep fuel loads lower."*

*"The difference now is the regular burning doesn't occur anymore, so we don't know what will happen in the future.*

*"Things that happened in the past can be beneficial, and regular small scale burning in the forest may be a reason for less big fires."*

