

Submission to 2021 Major Event Review For Victoria's Fire Impacted Forests

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Dear members of the Strategic Forest Frameworks Team,

I would like to make a submission regarding the Summary Report of the Major Event Review of the 2019–20 bushfires.

**Who are you? What stories do you have of connecting with the forests?
Why is it important to you to protect forests?**

Including personal stories, in your own words, about your experiences of forests and wildlife and how you have witnessed them being affected by the bushfires will have the most powerful impact.

E.g. "I grew up exploring the box ironbark forests on Dja Dja Wurrung country in the Central Goldfields. The towering stands of eucalypts home to honeyeaters and grey kangaroos are a fond memory from my childhood. Now living in Melbourne, I am acutely aware of how important a healthy forest ecosystem is even to city-dwellers – as habitat for threatened wildlife species, as an attraction for outdoor recreation and tourism, and as a carbon sink to help combat the climate crisis."

What are your impressions after reading through the Summary Report? How well do you feel it addressed the impacts you are most concerned about?

You might like to mention that the report skews towards the impacts on forest industries, such as logging. While there is some information on threatened species and biomes, there is not a lot of detail on the effects on recreation, Traditional Owner cultural heritage, and so-called "ecosystem services" ie. water catchments, soil erosion, and carbon sequestration. And the phrase "climate change" isn't used once.

How were you and your community most immediately impacted by the bushfires? What do you believe are the most important consequences of the fires?

Some themes to expand upon:

- Serious impacts on Victoria's unique forest ecology, already under threat by previous drought, bushfires, and logging.
- Threatened plant and wildlife species affected both directly by fires and indirectly by greatly reduced habitat.
- Actions allowed under RFAs after the fires, specifically salvage logging of burnt forests, compounding the damage caused by the fires.
- Release of 57 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, contrary to the National Forest Policy Statement which aims to increase forests' carbon sink capacity.
- [3 billion animals killed or displaced](#).

What are the environmental, cultural and economic aspects of forests that are most important to you? How can they be better managed after the fires?

Some points to consider:

- The significance of mature forest areas being allowed to become old-growth as a way of minimising risks of future mega-fires
- The need to support the recovery of bushfire-affected threatened species through an overhaul of the current CAR reserve system
- The value of nature-based tourism for economic recovery in bushfire-affected areas

- The importance of protecting forests to address the climate crisis, which already contributes to longer and more intense fire seasons.
- The cultural significance of the landscapes and totems in the forest to First Nations people that logging is destroying.

What do you think the most powerful actions could be to ensure the health and longevity of forest areas?

Forest groups around Victoria have suggested actions such as:

- Respect First Nations people's rights to have the ultimate say over what happens on Country
- Commit to taking action from the recommendations of this MER (currently non-binding)
- Declare an immediate moratorium on logging until comprehensive surveys of unburnt forest can be undertaken to identify habitat for threatened species
- Cease fire salvage logging to maximise forests' ability to act as a carbon sink
- Remove the exemption of the logging industry from environmental laws under the RFAs
- Accelerate the transition away from native forest logging to occur within the next 2–3 years
- Prepare updated Recovery Plans for species impacted by the fires and threatened by ongoing logging
- Prioritise funding for restoring bushfire-affected habitat and provide better resources for weed and pest control programs to improve recovery from bushfire events

I support the submissions made by forest protection groups Goongerah Environment Centre, Rubicon Forest Protection Group, Kinglake Friends of the Forest, Victorian National Parks Association, Friends of the Earth Melbourne, Lawyers for Forests, Environment Victoria and The Wilderness Society and echo their call for an immediate suspension of logging in forests impacted by the fires and an end to the exemption of the logging industry from environmental laws.

I also support the [Sovereigns on Forests](#) statement, issued to ministers in 2019. First Nations custodians have given no free, prior and informed consent for logging on their country. The rightful, traditional custodians of this land should be making self-determined decisions about its management. Any treaty process is tokenistic while clear-fell logging continues to have a damaging impact on First Nations country.

I request the Government act urgently to protect what remains of native forests and their unique flora and fauna in the aftermath of the bushfires – and to ensure a rapid, just transition out of native forest logging for local workers and regional communities who rely on healthy and sustainable forests long-term.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,
Your Name