



## Media Release

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### NATIONAL BUSHFIRE SUMMIT URGENTLY NEEDED

Australia urgently needs a national bushfire management plan in order to avoid another tragedy on scale of the recent Victorian bushfires, according to the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI).

“I’ve written to the Prime Minister highlighting the urgent need for a national approach to prevention and management of bushfires. I’m urging the Prime Minister to hold a national summit – bringing together forest and bushfire experts to analyse and rebuild our nation’s approach to bushfire management. The current state-based policies are not working and it’s time the Commonwealth Government led an Australia-wide bushfire prevention and management system,” said NAFI CEO Allan Hansard.

“The current process of locking forests up in conservation reserves and national parks with no on-going fire management regime has proven to be fatally wrong. We will never be able to stop the fires from starting, but we need to minimise the risk of the fire getting out of control. Forests need to be actively managed to ensure debris does not build up providing a fuel for fires that inevitably start, and forest access roads must be maintained so that fire fighters can reach a blaze when one does break out.

“Last week I visited the fire-ravaged areas of Victoria and saw first-hand the destruction that the current fire management policies were unable to prevent. The Government has a responsibility to these people and all Australians to devise a bushfire management and prevention policy that will protect us from a repeat of the current devastation.

“Bushfire management policy must be based on the best scientific knowledge, not the whims of uninformed ‘green’ ideologists. These current ‘green’ policies are clearly not working and, ironically, have contributed to the destruction of the very areas they were supposed to protect.

“I’m offering Senator Bob Brown, leader of the Greens, an invitation to meet on this issue so I can provide him with a full briefing on how the current policy isn’t working,” said Mr Hansard.

A copy of Mr Hansard’s letter to the Prime Minister is below.

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Dear Prime Minister,

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who have been affected by the recent and continuing bushfires in Victoria. We applaud the efforts your government is making to ensure relief aide is rapidly deployed to the victims of this unprecedented tragedy. These people have suffered unimaginable, unspeakable trauma and unprecedented loss of life and property during Australia's worst ever bushfire event.

As a nation, we owe it to these people and all Australians who live in forested regions of Australia to do everything possible to prevent such a tragedy from ever reoccurring. Time and again governments have conducted reviews and enquiries following severe bushfires, but it is now clear the rules of engagement with bushfires in Australia need re writing.

This tragedy has taught us some cruel lessons. The key ones are:

- This bushfire rewrote all the records in relation to its ferocity, unpredictability and impact on life;
- It was unprecedented, but it fitted a disturbing recent trend where, for what ever reason, bushfire is now a more frequent and severe event;
- Our present approach to managing for fire risk particularly in our forested national parks and reserves areas is now inadequate and has let the people of Australia down.

To date we have put our efforts into curing the problem, fighting the fires when they occur. However as we have seen, it would not have mattered how many fire fighters, water tankers, or water cranes we had, we would not have been able to prevent the ferocity of the Victorian bushfires. Only through prevention measures that reduce forest floor fuel load and hence fire intensity could we have minimised the ferocity.

Bush fires do not recognise state boundaries, and although Victorian Premier John Brumby is to be applauded for putting all bushfire management policies under review of a Royal Commission, it's not enough to just review Victoria's policies. We need a national approach, led by the Commonwealth Government, to bushfire prevention and management. As Premier Brumby quite rightly said, everything in relation to the way we manage our forest assets to prevent bushfire should be on the table for review.

Australia has some of the best forest scientists and forest managers in the world. Their advice often goes unheard, unnoticed and unheeded against the loud anti logging, anti fuel reduction burning rhetoric of the green movement. As a result and unfortunately, our fire prevention practices and policies have been driven more by the science of green preferences than sound forest science. We are now seeing the deadly results of this approach. It is time to stop, listen and take notice of the forest experts.

Prime Minister, recently when you were faced with the unprecedented effects of the economic and financial crisis you lead the nation by mobilising and uniting the federal and state governments in

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response to the crisis. We now face an unprecedented natural disaster. An approach that unites the nation on this issue is also required.

To get some fresh thinking on this approach I suggest holding a National Bushfire Summit, where forest and bushfire experts are brought together to analyse and rebuild our nation's approach to bushfire management. This of course could be conducted in conjunction with the Victorian Government Royal Commission. Outcomes of the summit could be implemented through the Council of Australian Governments. This initiative would have the full support of the forest industry and I'm sure the broader Australian community. Such an approach is essential if we are to avoid future bushfire disasters.

Prime Minister, the Australian people are looking to you to ensure a tragedy of this type is never repeated. I would like to meet with you to discuss how we may be able to meet their expectation on this issue of national importance.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Hansard  
Chief Executive Office  
National Association of Forest Industries