



Media Release

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National bushfire summit urgently needed to protect Australia's bush communities

The National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) is urgently calling on the Australian Government to convene a national bushfire summit to build a framework for bushfire prevention and management in order to minimize the devastating effects of bushfires on rural communities, industries and economies, saying bushfire management is a matter of national security.

"It's time the Australian Government led a nationwide landscape bushfire prevention and risk management system, to provide coordination and consistency to bushfire prevention. This is surely an issue of national security and should be treated as such," said NAFI CEO Allan Hansard.

"I'm urging the Prime Minister to hold a national bushfire summit – bringing together forest and bushfire experts to have a fresh look at our nation's approach to bushfire management. There are a number of state based initiatives underway, such as the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission, looking at this issue but no process to coordinate these initiatives at a national level.

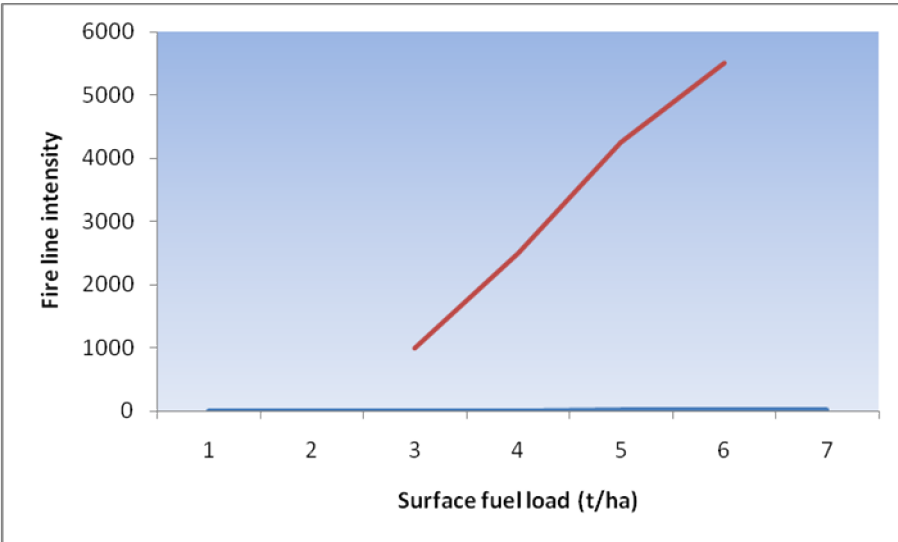
"A national landscape bushfire risk management system would ensure fuel loads around bush communities and exit roads are reduced and maintained at a low level through using an appropriate fuel reduction approach; in some areas this could be prescribed burns and mechanical removal of fuel, in other areas grazing may be the best approach. While NAFI applauds the new approaches states are taking to early warning and evacuation systems, the evacuation routes must also be safe to use. The tragic experience of Black Saturday showed fires can travel incredibly fast and, where fuel has been allowed to build up, can quickly block exit roads and trap people who may be evacuating.

"Every year thousands of people who live in bushfire prone areas face the fear and uncertainty associated with the potential impact of bushfires on their families, homes, communities and livelihoods. In the worst of circumstances, bushfires cause a loss of life and property. But even comparatively less severe fires have a devastating effect on flora and fauna, and release tones of carbon emissions into the atmosphere. This is in addition to the economic impacts that result from the loss of livelihoods and the cost of fire fighting and clean-up efforts.

"The Seasonal Bushfire Outlook released this week by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre predicts a worse than usual bushfire season for most of Australia. Bushfire management needs to be dealt with now; we cannot continue to put it off.

"The mechanism is already in place, through COAG, for the Australian Government to implement a national bushfire policy – and with bushfires already devastating parts of New South Wales, the question is whether Government can afford to wait another summer."

Figure 1 below demonstrates the relationship between increased fuel load and fire intensity.



Simplified from Source: CSIRO submission COAG National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management (2004), page 102.

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