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Our Ref: CB/99/056/04  
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Wednesday, 12 August 2009

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Mr Simon Birrell  
OREN  
c/o Apollo Bay Post Office  
APOLLO BAY VIC 3233



Dear Mr Birrell,

Recently VicForests was made aware of a media release signed by you entitled 'Logging practices to blame for historic lack of fuel reduction burns' dated 14 July 2009. I would like to offer you the VicForests perspective on some of the points that you have raised.

VicForests was established as a State business corporation and is charged with responsibility for the sustainable harvest and commercial sale of timber from Victoria's public forest estate. One of the associated roles of VicForests is to manage the planning, and provide adequate resources for the execution of regeneration burns.

Since the Esplin report was released based on the findings following a review of the 2002-03 fires (which predate VicForests establishment), the management of prescribed burns has changed dramatically. No longer are regeneration burns the responsibility of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) rather it is VicForests who is managing this task. This has allowed DSE to concentrate their resources on Fuel Reduction Burns (FRBs) and Ecological Burns which in the past year has exceeded its targeted area. VicForests has no ability or want to divert DSE focus away from fuel reduction or ecological burns for the purpose of regeneration burning.

The benefit of VicForests being responsible for regeneration burns is that we have a vested interest in ensuring successful regeneration burns are conducted as this is crucial to providing a receptive seed bed that will provide for the germination of eucalypt seeds.

An ancillary benefit is that regeneration burns provide an excellent environment for the training and accreditation of forest fire fighters. On the occasions that DSE staff are present at regeneration burns it is often part of a training or accreditation process which assists in maintaining a high level of expertise in managing high intensity forest fires.

You have asked that the native logging industry needs to be evaluated to ascertain the overall risk with respect to escaped coupe burns and fires started from logging equipment. Fire poses a significant risk to our business and we are careful to ensure that our actions do not cause fires to escape. The figure of one in 20 wildfires being started by logging industry practices is incorrect. The 3% of fires that are caused by machinery exhaust cannot be solely attributed to harvesting practices but across all machinery used in native forests including public vehicles and chainsaws. In fact on



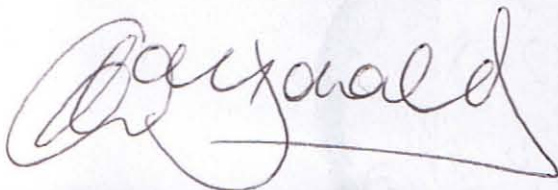
the rare occasion that a harvesting machine causes a fire to start, it is quickly dealt with by the contractor before it escapes the coupe boundary. The 2% of fire escapes from prescribed burning relate to all forms of prescribed burning including fuel reduction burns. Prescriptions for regeneration burns include requirements for fire breaks such as an earthen trail to be developed or fuel moisture differentials to exist between harvesting slash and the adjoining forest and historically these techniques have worked well to contain regeneration burns within the coupe boundary.

What you fail to acknowledge in your press release is the critical role that the native forest industry plays in fire suppression efforts. VicForests is part of the Networked Emergency Organisations (NEO) and participate in emergency situations such fire. Our staff are highly skilled in forest fire fighting and along with our contracting workforce and their equipment were used extensively in the recent Black Saturday bushfires. A number of wildfires, particularly those started by lightning strikes, are quickly contained each year due to the rapid deployment of harvesting contractors and their equipment who are working in remote areas.

The incorporation of local knowledge to achieve a greater number of burns outside of burn prescriptions such was one of the conclusions of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee whose work you quote in your media release. VicForests staff play an important role in providing this local knowledge in the planning and operational stages of prescribed burning. This inquiry also found 'there is no evidence of an adverse impact by forestry operations on the level of prescribed burning' (Finding 2.4).

I would be more than happy to discuss this with you further. I can be contacted on (03) 9608 9533.

Yours sincerely,



**Cameron MacDonald**  
Director – Strategy and Corporate Affairs

CC:

The Hon. John LENDERS, MLC, Treasurer  
The Hon. Gavin Jennings, MLC, Minister for Environment and Climate Change