

The members of the Friends of Warrandyte State Park include more than 300 members, many of whom were directly touched by the bushfires and some of whom lost family members. Our deepest sympathy extends to all who have suffered.

While encouraging all reasonable steps be taken to reduce the likelihood of loss of life in future bushfires, including fuel reduction burning where scientific evidence show they can be effective, we are concerned that poorly thought out measures that are not based on scientific evidence will cause further damaged to already stressed biological communities.

Our submission is relevant to the following four points taken from the original terms of reference document:

“2. The preparation and planning by governments, emergency services, other entities, the community and households for bushfires in Victoria, including current laws, policies, practices, resources and strategies for the prevention, identification, evaluation, management and communication of bushfire threats and risks.”

“6. The preparation and planning for future bushfire threats an risks, particularly the prevention of loss of life.

7 Land use planning and management, including urban and regional planning.”

“11. Training, infrastructure, and overall resourcing needs.”

We would like to make the following points:

In addition to human losses, the bushfire has resulted in a huge loss of life amongst the wildlife as well as a reduction in native vegetation. Much of this loss will be to species and communities already threatened by loss of habitat, clearing, weeds and feral animals. Without appropriate action, biodiversity in large areas of Victoria will be at further risk.

*“Maintenance of the diversity of animals, plants and micro-organisms is at the heart of a healthy ecosystem” from **Australia’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 Consultation draft***

Post bushfire, careful rehabilitation of disturbed areas such as dozer lines in high quality vegetation areas will be needed in order to prevent further serious environmental weed infestation. Whether native but not indigenous, such as Sallow Wattle, or exotic such as Blackberries or Flax-leafed Broom, environmental weeds not only reduce biodiversity but also increase the fuel load available for future fires.

While prescribed burns are an important part of reducing fuel loads in many areas, It is important that such burns are carried out in accordance sound scientific research to ensure that they are achieving the stated aims of reducing danger from bushfire whilst keeping the risk to the wider plant and animal communities to a minimum. Sadly little research that looks beyond the effects on the overstory (ie.trees) has been carried out.

Catering for the needs of fauna in fire management: science or just wishful thinking? Michael F. Clarke
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There is therefore a great need for funding and coordination of research on controlled burning and the impact of this bushfire on all our native plant communities and native wildlife.

There is also a need for funding and management to actually reduce the presence of environmental weeds and feral animals where it is already clear that these increase both the risk to biodiversity and also increase bushfire fuel loads.

It is also critical that governments at all levels take effective action to reduce our input into the anthropogenic climate change. In Victoria, global warming can only mean an increased frequency of the kind of conditions that were present on 7 February.

To summarise, we see the need for increased research into the effects of controlled burning (fuel reduction and ecological) and bushfires upon entire floral and faunal communities

Sufficient funding to allow for scientifically based control of environmental weeds and feral animals especially post bushfire

Effective government policies at all levels to reduce our contribution to global warming

We strongly support views presented in more detail by the Victorian National Parks Association.