



Media release

In case of forest fire, call the bureaucracy

The Victorian Government took less time to investigate the Wye River bushfire disaster than it took to extinguish the flames.

Rob de Fégely, National President of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, has questioned the Victorian Government's rush to release findings from an interim report by its Inspector-General for Emergency Management into the Wye River bushfire saying, 'Professional foresters are concerned that political expediency may be taking precedence over the need to uncover deficiencies in fire control tactics.

'Learning lessons from major bushfires may prevent life and property losses under similar bushfire scenarios.

'From Minister Garret's comments to The Age newspaper, it seems that the Inspector-General for Emergency Management has focused primarily on a back-burn undertaken under risky conditions several days after the fire was ignited. Unfortunately, this has overshadowed the far more important question of what fire-fighting tactics were employed during the first 48 hours after the fire started.

'It was the failure to contain what was then a very small fire which ultimately led to substantial loss of property in the towns of Wye River and Separation Creek several days later.

'The Wye River fire started in country that was not remote and was subject to days of mild weather.

'Our fire management agencies and fire-fighters perform a wonderful community service. However, the Government has a duty to allow them to do their job free from unwarranted bureaucratic and operational constraints. Given the potential for severe economic and environmental loss from bushfires, the Victorian community has a right to know whether seriously threatening bushfires are being attacked with urgency.

'Given the release of findings from an interim report, the Institute of Foresters of Australia joins with the local community and fire-fighters in reiterating our earlier call for an independent inquiry into the damaging Wye River fire, and the tactics used to contain it,' said Mr de Fégely.

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The IFA is Australia's professional body for foresters and other forestry professionals