

# Emergency Management Victoria

Emergency Management Commissioner

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Mr Ryan Batchelor MP  
Chair  
Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee  
Parliament of Victoria  
*via email: [2026summerfires@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:2026summerfires@parliament.vic.gov.au)*

Dear Mr Batchelor,

I write in relation to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria (Inquiry), to be conducted by the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee (Committee), as agreed to by the Legislative Council on 4 February 2026.

The devastating bushfires experienced across Victoria this year continue to have profound impacts on communities, emergency responders, wildlife, the economy and the environment. Extreme storm events, flash flooding and heatwaves have also had significant impacts.

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and the broader emergency management sector are committed to participating in the Inquiry to the fullest extent possible and to providing the Committee with the information it requires to fully examine the Inquiry's terms of reference. The Inquiry will contribute to Victoria's emergency management sector's commitment to continuous improvement.

At the same time I am very concerned that, under the current timeframes, the Committee will be progressing the Inquiry while significant response and early community recovery operational activities are ongoing. I met with operational Heads of Agencies late last week, and we are particularly concerned that participation in the Inquiry is already impacting our operational resources, including key operational leadership personnel, who are trying to balance operational readiness and response with preparing materials in order to meet the Inquiry's deadlines.

There are currently still a number of active major bushfires across Victoria, including the Trawool and Gaffneys Creek fire. Both fires started this last week and are currently subject to community warnings, with firefighters deployed from both Victoria and Canada. We also anticipate the fire risk will continue for another two to three months. The Australian and New Zealand National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (AFAC) bushfire outlook for autumn 2026, which is scheduled for release this week, will show an increased bushfire risk into Autumn for the majority of Victoria, other than the Mallee and East Gippsland (refer map in figure 1 attached). This outlook is a reflection of the long-term drought conditions which have been in effect prior to and during the season, as well as the forecast for a dry and warm autumn by the Bureau of Meteorology (refer figure 2).



The operational Heads of Control Agencies and I are concerned that witness preparation and hearings could be called during this period of increased fire risk for our state. Critical planned burning programs will also be a key focus of fire agencies when conditions allow from mid-Autumn.

I therefore respectfully ask that consideration be given to reviewing and extending the Inquiry's current timeframes, including the proposed timeframe for making a submission; holding public hearings; and finalisation of the Committee's report. Ideally, we would seek that submissions be extended until the end of May and that hearings not commence before June, post the Autumn season. An extended timeframe would ensure the sector is able to participate more fulsomely in the Inquiry and that the Inquiry ultimately receives the highest quality input to support meaningful and enduring outcomes for the Victorian community.

If you wish to discuss this letter further, I welcome a conversation. To arrange a meeting regarding this matter, please contact [David.Clavarino@emv.vic.gov.au](mailto:David.Clavarino@emv.vic.gov.au), Director, Strategy and Policy, Emergency Management Victoria.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the people of Victoria.

Yours sincerely,

**Tim Wiebusch ESM**  
**Emergency Management Commissioner**

23/02/2026

*cc: Minister for Emergency Services – Vicki Ward MP*



**Figure 1 – AFAC Autumn Bushfire Seasonal Outlook**



**Figure 2 – March to May rainfall and temperature outlooks – BoM 19 February**

