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28 September 2016

Mr Michael Baker
Secretary, Legislative Council Standing Committees
Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Parliament House
East Melbourne 3002



BY EMAIL michael.baker@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Baker

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE – INQUIRY INTO FIRE SEASON PREPAREDNESS

Thank you to the Environment and Planning Committee for inviting VicForests to provide evidence at the public hearing for the inquiry into Victoria's fire season preparedness on 14 September 2016.

VicForests responses to the questions that were taken on notice and raised by the Committee at the hearing are outlined below.

Bushfire Management Agreement

VicForests understands that a response will be provided by Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) regarding the Bushfire Management Agreement between VicForests and DELWP (formally the Department of Sustainability and Environment).

Costs reimbursed for fire management services

The reimbursed costs for fire services provided over the past 3 years are summarised in the table below.

	VicForests Fire Services provided to DELWP (fire suppression)	DELWP Fire Services provided to VicForests (regeneration)
2013-14	\$ 867,000	\$ 510,000
2014-15	\$ 249,000	\$ 660,000
2015-16	\$ 437,000	\$ 1,046,000

Escaped regeneration burns costs

In accordance with the Bushfire Management agreement between VicForests and DELWP, VicForests reimburses DELWP for all of DELWP's costs relating to its involvement in standard operations relating to regeneration burning activities, including but not limited to:

- salary and wages relating to normal time for the duration of the deployments, rest days, oncosts, overheads, standby, overtime, allowances, superannuation contributions and all other employee entitlements applicable under the current DELWP VPS certified agreement; and
- associated marginal operating costs (including operating costs relating to administration, vehicles and equipment).

Breach

During the planning for regeneration burns, areas that are planned to be burned and contingency areas are identified. Contingency areas are areas adjoining a burning unit for which burning is an acceptable option should control lines around the planned area fail to contain the burn.

In circumstances where a regeneration burn breaches the harvested area, but remains within the planned contingency area this is generally considered a component of the regeneration burning activity and all costs are borne by VicForests as described above.

Bushfire

In circumstances where the burn area boundary breach is more significant, DELWP may declare it a bushfire. This is triggered in the event of the burn extending outside the identified contingency area and/or where control of the fire outside the contingency area requires significant additional resources.

If VicForests regeneration burning activities escalate beyond a standard operation, and DELWP determine that the escape regeneration fire is a bushfire (in accordance with the DELWP Planned Burning Manual), VicForests is not required to pay for the fire suppression activities undertaken by DELWP after the declaration has been made. This is consistent with government policy on recompense for fire suppression activities performed by DELWP during a declared bushfire event.

If an escape regeneration burn is declared a bushfire by DELWP, VicForests will participate in the consequent fire suppression activities and will not seek reimbursement for any costs associated with its participation.

Deployment records for VicForests' suppression activities

VicForests is working on accessing the deployment records for our suppression activities and we require further time to complete this undertaking.

Logging does not increase fire risk and severity – Report

Attwill, P.M., Ryan, M.F., Burrows, N., *et al.* (2014) review. Timber harvesting does not increase fire risk and severity in wet eucalypt forests of southern Australia is attached to this correspondence.

Fire Season Preparedness Inquiry – Joint Agency Submission

VicForests understands DELWP is preparing the information regarding individual material used in the Victorian government's joint agency submission.

Treatment costs

VicForests utilises a range of site preparation techniques to prepare areas harvested for regeneration. These include the two techniques raised by the Committee, burning of harvesting residue (slash) and rough heaping (heavy machines pushing the slash into piles known as windrows). Due to a range of environmental, contractor, location, area size and other factors the cost of each operation may vary significantly. The general range of costs of these operations are described below as a cost per hectare:

Operation	Cost Range
High Intensity Burning	\$500 - \$700 per hectare treated
Rough Heaping	\$1,100 - \$2,200 hectare treated

If you require any further information, please contact me.

Yours sincerely



Robert Green
Chief Executive Officer