LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires across Victoria

Harcourt – Thursday 30 April 2026

MEMBERS

Ryan Batchelor – Chair
David Ettershank – Deputy Chair
Melina Bath
Gaelle Broad
Jacinta Ermacora
Wendy Lovell
Sarah Mansfield
Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell
Sheena Watt

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee

WITNESSES

Rodney Carter, *(via videoconference);* and

Cam Walker, Coordinator, Campaigns, Friends of the Earth Melbourne.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the proceedings of the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the 2026 summer fires, coming to you today from Harcourt. We welcome our next witnesses and remind them that all evidence that we take is protected by parliamentary privilege, as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore, the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearings. Those transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

Welcome. My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Chair of the committee and a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council. I will ask committee members to introduce themselves.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Hello. I am Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for the Northern Victoria Region.

Gaelle BROAD: Hi. I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

Wendy LOVELL: Wendy Lovell, Member for Northern Victoria.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

John BERGER: John Berger, Member for Southern Metro.

The CHAIR: Now I will ask the witnesses to introduce themselves. So, Rodney, do you maybe want to go first, just stating your full name for the Hansard record, please?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. Thank you to the Chair. I am Rodney John Carter. I am a Dja Dja Wurrung person. I still reside in Bendigo, in central Victoria. I have got a life full of cultural experiences. In particular one of those elements is relative to the inquiry, around cultural fire. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Rodney. Cam, do you want to state your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of?

Cam WALKER: Yes. Campbell Walker, Campaigns Coordinator with Friends of the Earth.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. I will now invite each of you in turn to make an opening statement, and then the committee will proceed to questions. Rodney, do you want to kick us off?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. Thanks for that courtesy. Apologies that I cannot be there in person, but [speaking in language]. In my language, I am just paying respect to the ancestors and acknowledging you as members of the committee for the inquiry.

If I jump straight into it, as a reflective moment, 2019 – I think it was Lily D'Ambrosio who was the relevant minister at the time, who launched a significant strategy for the state of Victoria in particular. We call it the traditional owner burning strategy. That was a culmination of a few years of community representatives bringing knowledge and experience together to try and communicate in a document – so within a modern, Western-type format, in a sense – knowledge that was borrowed from ancestors, fragmented of course in us as Victorians understanding the state's history over the last couple of hundred years. But it is a really practical, thoughtful and constructive document, largely, as a strategy. We had fantastic work, and I cannot speak for all traditional owners in the state of Victoria, but significant support by the state government through its relevant environmental departments like the DEECA and Forest Fire Management Victoria itself. And of course, where

we have had intersections with the Country Fire Authority, they have also been extremely supportive and, I think, inquisitive to understand what cultural fire means.

Coming back to the strategy, there are six principles as simple statements around what we would need to do as Victorians. Whether we have greater interest in ecological function and environmental values or where the practitioners are looking at what strategically needs to take place to reduce fuel hazard that is adjacent to significant assets, life and property, these principles are applicable. It is cultural burning, and it is the right fire at the right time. Largely, if we look at historical examples of weather records, there are hundreds of days in any one calendar year – setting aside climate change and its impacts – that we can be practically applying and giving fire to landscape to reduce fuel hazard and to minimise negative effects upon the environment and ecological function.

Just very briefly, and I will finish up, principle 2 is to burn with cultural responsibility. So there are all of those industry standards in safe-type work practices, but also the importance, I think, in inherent responsibility as a people. Principle 3: cultural fire is living knowledge. It is something to be shared – not taken, not stolen, but definitely it is a useful tool to empower all of us, I think, to be giving fire more frequently to landscape. Of course, principle 4 is about the monitoring and evaluation and the research and applying the database tools that many of us have got. Principle 5 is that country is managed holistically. I think this is key now to systems function, whether it be vegetation based or if it is animal based – we need to look at all things relative, and that includes water as well. And principle 6 closes with: this is very healing to traditional owners, given that we know the historical facts around our treatment as people. I would say the Safer Together policy that the state has got – it is incumbent upon all of us and our leadership, I think, to not trigger our citizens, our communities that live at country, when they see a plume of smoke and they are concerned. We need to societally get to a place where when we see multiple plumes of smoke – as the newcomers documented in their journals when they came to country, they were curious. For us as a people, we felt safe, we felt at one with country and the environment. That is the place that we should take all Victorians in our leadership. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Rodney. Cam.

Cam WALKER: Thank you. I am representing Friends of the Earth here, but a lot of our staff and key volunteers are based in regional Victoria. Many of us are involved in emergency services, community resilience and disaster response. I think those experiences are represented well in our submission, and I would welcome any questions on that. I am also a local and a volunteer firefighter. I spent many days up here in Harcourt from 9 January, and I bring those experiences to this. I just want to start by thanking the committee for the opportunity and thanking you for extending the timeline for submissions. I thought that was a really good move, and it demonstrated you are willing to listen to the community. I urge you to deliver your report mid-year rather than towards the end of the year. I think you are going to find some really important things, and it is important the community hears of those well this side of November.

I understand that we here to identify what went well and what went wrong, but I do want to start by acknowledging that our emergency services are incredibly professional organisations. My experience was that they ensured that Victoria was ready for this summer's fires, that they prepared for the extreme conditions we faced, they managed the fires effectively and they responded quickly as fires developed. The proof of that, I would say, is that compared with 2009 there was much less loss of life. I feel like we have learnt a lot in this state in those years since 2009, and also from the lessons of Black Summer.

There are four key things I just wanted to raise quickly. The first one is the elephant in the room of course is climate change. We know that climate change is making fire seasons longer and more intense. There are two things we need to take into account there. One is that longer seasons are having significant impacts on firefighters, on resources like trucks and aircraft – and that includes things like the aircraft we lease in from overseas, given that they are facing longer seasons in the northern hemisphere – and on just maintenance. If you have a tanker that is out on a fireground, instead of three months a year, but five or six months a year, that brings in hidden costs as well. There are impacts on environment and there are impacts on rural, regional and increasingly urban-fringe communities. I think it is important we understand that it is not just physical impacts of fighting fires and recovering; it is psychological impacts. Living locally and having gone up our mountain, people here love Leanganook, you know. It is a mountain that is really deep in people's hearts, and how heartbroken people were to see what happened up there. Like, there is a psychological toll that comes. It is not just the tangible things – the houses lost – it is also the things that people feel in their hearts.

We do need to stop contributing to the problem, and that means ensuring a rapid and complete transition away from our reliance on fossil fuels to a mix of renewables, storage and energy efficiency as rapidly as possible. That is really essential if we are going to be serious about reducing future fire risk. The second one of course is the very topical issue of fuel reduction burning, and we would argue that there should be no return to a hectare target for fuel reduction. This will push FFMV to burn areas for the sake of meeting targets, with potentially no tangible benefits to communities. It will increase ecological damage, and it will force burning into unsafe windows, increasing the chance that fires will get away on crews. We do have to accept that there is growing concern in the community about the ecological impacts of fuel reduction. Burn programs do run the risk of losing social licence unless ecological damage is reduced in our burning programs, and there is a lot of detail on that in our submission. I am happy to take questions.

The next issue is traditional owners. It is great to have Dja Dja Wurrung represented here today, and we feel that it is essential that the committee engage deeply with all the Aboriginal organisations that have cultural burning programs to understand not only their aspirations for country but also their funding needs.

The question of resources – of course we need a lot more money. But in saying that, I do want to acknowledge the recent announcement of substantial funds that has been made in the last 10 days or so regarding CFA and FFMV. Top order things we can see are the need for continued replacement of ageing appliances, especially the single-cab trucks – I think Andrew mentioned that this morning – continued investment in rapid detection, early response, additional repel teams and hover-exit crews; and continued investment in both career and volunteer firefighters. The AWU make a number of recommendations around staffing, which we fully support, in their submission. And we need to understand whether Victoria is adequately served by our current leasing arrangements around the very large aircraft, the type 1 helis and the large air tankers, which we do generally lease in from overseas.

One local issue that I do want to raise as a firefighter is that there were many reports of qualified wildlife rescuers who were kept away from the firegrounds. As a firefighter, the things that keep me awake at night are attending motor vehicle accidents where there is trauma and death and being on firegrounds and finding injured animals. It is one of the most awful things that will ever happen to you, and we are not trained as firefighters to deal with this. I do think there are strong community expectations about looking after injured wildlife on firegrounds, and I hope committee will drill into what happened with all the anecdotal stories about people being excluded.

Then finally, I do want to just mention the question of diversity and inclusion, and it might feel slightly tangential to the terms of reference. For us to be able to fight fires effectively we need to grow the number of firefighters we have, and the best way to do that is to build diversity. It is easy to talk about trucks and money, and it is much harder to talk about culture. And by opening that, I am not suggesting I have solutions here, but we do need to accept there are many barriers to people signing on as volunteers. We heard some of that this morning: people working two jobs, family commitments and all the rest of it. There are also the invisible barriers. Personally, I know dozens of people that have come on board as volunteers who have left because they did not feel welcome or safe, and they are invariably women, gender-diverse people, gay, lesbian, queer people and non-Anglo-Saxon people. That is just a fact: that our brigade cultures are not always safe for everyone, and they are not always welcoming for everyone.

It is a very hard thing to change culture, and I feel that we need to be willing to name this and start to think about, 'Well, how do we change culture?', because inherently we have a system that I support, which is a decentralised structure where brigades are the building blocks of the organisation. But it is hard to change in those decentralised circumstances. I acknowledge there are many brigades that are welcoming and inclusive, and we need to learn from them, and there are some fantastic ones in our region. We need to think about what structures can be put in place, possibly at district level rather than headquarters level, to assist brigades in building inclusive culture. We need to pursue options that will create opportunities for new and diverse people to sign up. There are some great things in the contemporary volunteer membership model that was recently tabled through CFA, and we do need to expand the remote area firefighting team into metro Melbourne. We think that will bring in younger and more diverse people.

Finally, I just hope that the committee can think through ideas about how we build inclusion. We have a very good policy at the state level on this that sits within the CFA. But I think there are a lot of very important conversations to be had about how we build that inclusion so that everyone does feel welcome to be involved.

That will be the key to ensuring that we can build the thriving membership base that we are going to need to fight the fires in coming years. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Cam. We really appreciate it. Rodney, I might start with a question to you if I can. You talked about how the frameworks on cultural burning have been established. What do you think some of the barriers are at the moment to the expansion of the use of cultural burning practices across the state?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. Good question. When we try and analyse our lack of effectiveness of implementation and to be practitioners, there is a diverse range of problems and, within that, practical solution stuff. If I digress just for a moment, I think, and this has been largely part of my life, what I want to influence is the long-term positioning of our needs. If we just take the simplest approach and we look at landscape, this is – not in a cultural way, it is its ability to burn, its flammability and understanding that the heat associated with materials that burn in a natural-type environment can have a detrimental effect. When we see these extreme climatic events – or weather events, probably more accurately – of course we are dealing with disasters inadvertently in this state. So how do you counteract that? You do what was done over 200 years ago. You have a comprehensive burn management program across the state of Victoria that on any day that it is suitable to be burning in small parcels, we have suitably resourced people with the right equipment to be doing that.

Look, I know that sounds simple. It is simple. It is about the commitment, I think, not of government or Parliament – be bipartisan around this, because this is an investment for your grandchildren's future. What are we prepared to do to support each other and apply that? I think that is critically important – that we play this long game. If we believe in climate change or we do not believe in climate change, we understand that this country, this state that we love so much, had a comprehensive fire regime – not everywhere, but mostly. The environmentalists will argue the perfectionist nature of adding a fire in a certain area. Look, I do not even like to get into those arguments. I am respectful and entertain the perspective and the view that gets put across, but I will not be drawn into inadvertent discussions that actually make us take our eye off the long-term benefit of us going forward.

I am sorry I went on that tangent. I think the main thing and a simple way to answer your question would be that comment about how brigades might act in terms of culture. There is very much – and you need a military element within fire management – a price to pay within that and I think in corporate-type practitioner structures. I think all the work is done in evaluating the inefficiencies, and you just probably need those documents tabled to your management.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Broad?

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you both. We have been as a committee going on different site visits and certainly have seen a number of people talk about planned burns and that they have made a big difference in their area. Rodney, can you perhaps expand just on the cultural burning practices? Is there any difference with planned burn? Just if you could talk through it, because we have heard others talk about how there might be multiple different authorities needed to get permission to go ahead with a planned burn. If you could explain the difference and just tell us: what is involved and can it be more streamlined?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. I think that is Gaelle that asked that question?

Gaelle BROAD: Yes. Sorry, Rodney; it is Gaelle.

Rodney CARTER: Thank you. Look, there is the science behind what we are doing here as practitioners. You can strike a match, and you have a flame immediately in your hand, and you apply it to a combustible, burnable material. What is really critical, and there needs to be improved teaching and learning around this, is how are you – the giver, the practitioner with the flame, basing your work on a plan? So then you stick to your script within that plan, and you have teams and you have suitable resources, and you take it out to country in the areas that need to be burnt. Again, I know I keep saying these things are simplistic. Outside of all the safety requirements, assessment of topography, the moisture content within the fuels that you are igniting, and finer fuels, as we understand, carrying fire faster than heavier fuels and that sort of stuff, it is having, I think, the more competent, capable leaders within these management structures, Gaelle, to get on and do it.

Look, I have been out of government for a number of years now but still supporting government and working with government on what we want to do across the state. I think it is about holding what your vision as

parliamentarians is for the state – what your vision is – and holding your management structures, your implementers, to what you want in that vision. I would suggest we can get you over the line to say, 'We need more fire in the right places at the right time.' I am pretty sure we can get some people within your management structures to do the maths around that, and maybe it will cost too much, but do it for 100 years. What is wrong with doing that? Progressively you will be more prepared, more armed to deal with these severe events, if you make this decision today and you put the wheels in motion tomorrow. We will not be worse off for this. We will be much better for it as a people. Thanks, Gaelle.

Gaelle BROAD: I am just interested too – with planned burns we have heard that it may not stop a fire, but it gives more chance to save an asset and perhaps with wildlife too – that they have got some refuge to go to rather than losing the whole lot. I think with Mount Alexander we saw by 11 January 80 per cent was contained, but it took eight days for the fire to be declared contained, so Mount Alexander did have a huge fuel load. Were there any planned burns done around that region? Because there is essential infrastructure on top. And do you think it would make a difference to being able to save more wildlife in future if we did have those mechanisms in place?

Rodney CARTER: Is that question to me?

Gaelle BROAD: You can answer, Rodney – or Cam if you wanted to? Yes, Rodney?

Rodney CARTER: I might defer to Cam, but I would say the fire hazard quantified, so the level at Leanganook/Mount Alexander, there are so many heavy fuels. So what happens is the fire moves through with the finer fuels and then the heavier fuels begin their ignition. They are massive by nature. That is why I described them as heavy fuels. They will burn for longer and they need more effort to put the fire out. So therein lie some of the issues we deal with with landscape management. Do we actually want to have all this fuel within our landscape? I would argue it is of a reasonable value to the environment, but it is also increasing the hazard we are societally exposing ourselves to and inadvertently the animals pay the price, don't they? Because we are probably too narrow in our vision. Cam would probably have a view on this too.

Cam WALKER: There has been a very long conversation in the local community about the mountain and whether there has been enough treatment up there. I think generally people say that there has not been. I would support a more active management on the mountain through the application of cool burning, but I also note that at the southern end, where we had a fire a couple of summers ago, that fire did not really take off because the vegetation was not actually that thick. Again, the problem we have when we talk about fuel reduction, if we just treat it as a simple measure, we come to the wrong places. It is a very nuanced thing. And it is around the ecosystem it occurs in, the vegetation type and so on. So we need to keep coming back to understanding that it is about what is appropriate in that vegetation community and in that landscape. But yes, I would support more active management up on the mountain.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you, and thank you both for appearing today. Cam, just following on from that, in your submission you recommend doing place-specific research to inform burning. Can you expand on what that might look like? And I do not know if you are aware of any examples of where that has occurred?

Cam WALKER: I think the work that we reference on page 14, which is by Gibbons, Gale, Moritz and Cary, is really significant here. When we look at planned burning, they say that generally, if it is done too far from houses, it has no benefit because even if you slow down a fire, it then can rebuild a head of steam. So they are saying burning needs to be done within 3 kilometres of houses, and it needs to be done within five years and upwind for it to be effective. But that is actually not as important, in terms of reducing house loss, as if you treat the houses, you harden the houses, you get rid of flammable materials and wood piles and things like that around the houses. I think there is some really interesting work being done through the CFA at present through the Safer Together program.

Just recently there was a burn up near Marysville where I think the planned burn taskforce were there with sprinklers, and they protected a line of fire-sensitive vegetation along a stream, and that allowed them to do treatment on one side, but not to damage the fire-sensitive vegetation. That is the sort of direction we have got to go in. And if we go larger, if we go back to just burning hectares, the areas we burn will be burnt edge to edge and there will be no ecological protection. So actually, where we are going to burn, we need to go closer

to human assets like houses, not do the broadacre, just endless landscape burns like the 30,000 hectares in the Snowy park as an example. And we do need to be more hands-on in protecting those assets. That is protecting the old trees, making sure there are barriers that do not allow the fire to go into those fire-sensitive, particularly the drainage, lines. Because as you build resilience in systems, as fire is excluded from those systems, what you do is you increase their ability to slow fires down when they are moving through a landscape.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Rodney, thanks for appearing today. I was wondering whether you could make any comments, and I am not sure if you can speak to this, but was there any impact on cultural heritage from the fires that went through this area?

Rodney CARTER: Not in terms of what is known, so that is largely good to hear. There is an element of benefit that comes from the fire in particular – more vegetation that is removed. So procedurally, the state and Aboriginal community organisations with their registered Aboriginal parties will be using this opportunity to go out and do some pretty simple visual transects across country to see if they can pick up some of the unknown. So good news – have not lost any scar trees and that sort of stuff. I thought to be prepared in respect of the heavy lift and all the views we have got to do around here, I spent a bit of time over the weekend in the greater Harcourt area. You look at the fire behaviour in terms of the way it is distributed in landscape. You get older and you get more experience. It is extremely unusual what was happening there, so hopefully somebody can be researching actually what happened in terms of the fire patterning, the distribution. It is quite unusual, if I just use that as a general type of statement.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both for your appearance this afternoon. Cam, if I could ask you: your submission calls for further investment into the CFA, and last week the government provided that. Do you think that is sufficient?

Cam WALKER: It is a good start, I would say. It is forward movement. What we need is forward movement, and I think that the fire conversation is often dominated by grievance and a sense of 'We haven't been given what we need', and I am always willing to acknowledge forward movement. And I think that was a significant announcement both for CFA and for FFMV.

John BERGER: And you are a volunteer yourself?

Cam WALKER: I am, yes.

John BERGER: Can you give us some of your experiences in the Harcourt fire?

Cam WALKER: Because I am in Castlemaine, we were on scene very quickly on that afternoon of the 9th, and it immediately was uncontrollable. I know there is a lot of debate around fuel reduction and the value of fuel reduction and the value of roadside burning. Of course, fuel is also habitat, and we need to remember that. But we arrived on scene up on Fogartys Gap Road really early on in the afternoon, and it came out of open farm country that was lightly grazed. It was not public land. Like Longwood and Walwa, a lot of those fires occurred on private, not public, land, so it is really important we keep the focus on that. It was absolutely uncontrollable, and there were a lot of appliances on scene very, very quickly and we just could not stop it. It ran across Fogartys Gap. People were chasing it as it went down towards the highway. It was absolute chaos – not chaos because of failure of the system, but chaos because we had such a large and rapidly moving fire. And the fact it went into the canopy so quickly and it was spotting so aggressively beyond expectations was just an indicator of the conditions we were working in. And I would say, unfortunately, they are the sorts of conditions that we expect under climate change scenarios – more of those extreme fire weather days.

John BERGER: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Berger. Ms Lovell.

Wendy LOVELL: Thank you. Rodney, I was just wondering what you think the capacity of the First Nations groups and the willingness of them to participate in a statewide cool burn program would be.

Rodney CARTER: It is happening at the moment. People want to self-determine and empower themselves as communities and through their organisations, so it is very varying. It is not as simple as the way you structure stuff around workforce and employing people and having – you need mechanical resources associated now with even cultural fire, to mitigate the safety and all those other workplace requirements and stuff, because they are sitting there for good reasons around safety. So it is very varying. I know 10 years ago, say, with Dja Dja Wurrung as an example, a lot of passionate people wanted to be involved and two or three years in, a lot of good competency-based training, acquisition of some mechanical resources, a bit of a flurry with planning and burning and engagement, and then people get older and then they get interested in creating family or in an employment pathway or venture. So you hit a bit of a trough around that.

We are just so far away from this ideal world where people can just be at landscape and be applying cultural fires. It has had to align itself usefully within, I think, the forest fire Victoria system where burn plans are adapted and cultural values and environmental and other values are all incorporated. That is utilised then to plan how you apply your resources and go out on any one day to do a plan. There is some brilliant work – we just have not immediately got enough people, and probably immediately not enough money. This is why I just keep harping on about what is this long game and what are we going to do, particularly you as parliamentarians, to really ensure that long-term commitment, because that will save – maybe immediately not to us. As Cam touched on, people can get pretty spicy about stuff immediately and how it affects us, but you can do great things that will affect the next few generations. But it has to start now, because otherwise your kids will be talking about this and saying, 'Jeez, we really should put into practice what Mum and Dad were talking about.' The opportunity is there – hopefully you can really influence this. But at the moment with the inquiry, you would know there is a lot of emotion. A lot of people have been hurt, the environment has been hurt, and you lose a bit of logic within that. But that is okay – people need to be able to express how they feel to heal.

Wendy LOVELL: Thank you. Cam, I just wonder about your views on the 10/30 or 10/50 rules?

Cam WALKER: I do not know what they are.

Wendy LOVELL: Oh, sorry. The 10/30 is that you can clear trees within 10 metres of your property –

Cam WALKER: Oh, okay.

Wendy LOVELL: and up to 30 metres you can clear other undergrowth.

Cam WALKER: Sorry, yes. I was thinking fireground protocols or something. Gosh. I do not have a blanket view, because I think it is very relative to place. If you are going to build in the middle of a really significant bit of bush, I am not convinced you should have the right to do that. I think that it is relevant to where you are relative to the vegetation around you. So I do not have a blanket yes or no either way, but I suspect it is probably more about where you are.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Ermacora.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Hello. Thank you. This is a really interesting perspective on fire prevention – although it is not quite fire prevention, it is also about the life of a landscape and the role of fire within it, from what Rodney is saying. I did want to ask you a question, Rodney. I cannot find your submission – your six principles I found really interesting. Is that published somewhere? If it is, would you be willing to give it to the inquiry as a document? And is there more detail under your six headings?

Rodney CARTER: Yes. Thanks. In 2019 the responsible minister, who I think was Lily D'Ambrosio at the time, launched the traditional owner burning strategy – a very enabling type document in its structure. I, fortunately, was the chair of the working group associated with it. The previous government had a lot of fire experience and a lot of cultural experience – they had an ancestor working for VicTrack at the time – and they have lost this knowledge. And it was not just Aboriginal people working for VicTrack who had the knowledge. They were seasonally burning all of the rail reserves; it was just normal. So to see that and to see how far we have come societally – it is sometimes right, because we are so risk averse, but in being risk averse too sometimes you have got to be careful because you suffocate from no opportunity, and what you need to practically decide about. So that strategy has been around a long time, Jacinta. It was a long time in the making, and I think if you looked at this in 100 years, this strategy, and married it with what the other state services need to be doing – it is timeless. It is relevant. I am happy to provide a copy, yes.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Great. And can I ask: are these principles pretty much applicable across all the Aboriginal regions, all the communities, and do you have training and education internally within communities in this space as well? I understand that some knowledge has been lost for some communities.

Rodney CARTER: Yes. This is a state strategy around traditional owner burning culturally. A number of the traditional owner groups in the state have got a more intimate burning strategy now that relates to their specific homelands, so then you will see how that differentiates around topography, types and distribution of vegetation, and that is –

Jacinta ERMACORA: Seasons.

Rodney CARTER: Yes, seasons, exactly; how our animals are distributed, and not everywhere, but in different locations.

Jacinta ERMACORA: What would be the benefits – sorry to jump in, because I have not got much time – to communities like Harcourt, to have that mountain burnt more along these principles?

Rodney CARTER: We have had meetings around it, and it would be brilliant. I do not think it is a lack of people that want to be doing this; it is the mobilising and getting to the point of being the practitioner. I mentioned earlier, I went for a drive around there. I am not a doomsday scientist, but you look through landscape, and to Cam's point where fire moved through private tenure into public tenure, in the places that are not burnt, it is like it could all happen again. And so there is something that has got to happen I think in us being private landowners, public land responsible, to be giving fire more somehow.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Cool burns instead of hot burns. Thanks.

Rodney CARTER: Cool burns. And tomorrow is going to be a perfect day, if you look at the weather – the gentleness of the wind, the consistent direction. We could have thousands of citizens and departments burning tomorrow. But we will walk out our back door and we will not see a plume of smoke.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you, Rodney and thank you, Cam, for the evidence you have given today. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript in about a week to review. With that, the committee will break and reset for the next witnesses. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.