Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

Hearing date: 1/05/2026

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Forest Fire Management Victoria, Chris Hardman

Received date: 09/06/2026

1. **P.29 Melina Bath**
   Question: - DEECA spoke earlier today about, I think it might have been, Chris, that you had some extra funding for the bushfire season. Can you please provide a breakdown of how much of that additional funding – that extra money – was actually spent on getting the Unimogs and the G-Wagons back and up on gear, because 300 of them were, we will say, stationary at the start of bushfire season. Could you take that on notice?

   Chris HARDMAN: Yes. Just, if I can, we can certainly provide a breakdown of the costs associated with that, but I can confirm that they did not come out of the additional funding we received for the bushfire season. That was for enhanced readiness and preparedness. That did not contribute to the fleet or G-Wagon issue.

   Melina BATH: Can you also please table the amount of funding by year that DEECA and FFMV have received for vegetation management over the past 10 years? It would be good for our committee to understand a profile of that.

   Chris HARDMAN: Yes, we will take that on notice.

   Response:

Fleet:

The financial costs associated with fleet remediation are being reconciled as part of end of financial year processes.

Upon identification of the fleet issues, reprioritisation of funding within DEECA was undertaken to fund rectification. The G-Wagen remediation program was completed on 15 December 2025. The Unimog remediation program was completed on 16 March 2026.

With respect to the Unimog and G-Wagen remediation programs:

- A significant portion of effort and funding during the 2025–26 preparedness period was directed toward:

    - Accelerated inspection and repair programs to address identified chassis and sub frame cracking issues
    - Return to service works, including engineering certification and safety assurance
    - Post repair inspection and monitoring regimes to ensure ongoing fitness for purpose
- These programs enabled the return of the entire priority G-Wagen fleet to service ahead of the fire season (by mid-December) and the progressive return of the Unimog vehicles from December to March.
- In parallel, additional investment supported surge fleet arrangements and surge capacity, including sourcing additional vehicles from partner agencies to maintain operational capability while remediation was underway.
- Also in parallel, plans were made for alternative firefighting strategies in the event that the remediation program was not successful. Thankfully these plans did not need to be activated as the remediation program was successful in having the fleet ready.

Fuel management:

Year	Total FFMVic fuel management investment
2024/25	$159.8M
2023/24	$159.5M
2022/23	$141.1M
2021/22	$151M
2020/21	$155.8M
2019/20	$109.2M
2018/19	$121.7M
2017/18	$113.5M
2016/17	$97.9M
2015/16	$108.5M

1. **P.30 Melina Bath**
   Question: Just a quick one back to Mr Hardman, at the start of the year, halfway through January and to the beginning of February, there were forest fire contractors, whether they were plant or panel contractors, who were not paid and were having to sustain significant bills, i.e. into the thousands and thousands of dollars, with government needing to pay them. Are you able to confirm – maybe not today – that those bills have been paid?-Clearly the government is only using either prescribed burns or

mechanical treatments, covering around 1 per cent of the forest estate. Can you provide a breakdown over the last five to six years on that, because it is clearly well short of the bushfire royal commission. I know the government is doing Safer Together, but I also note that the Victorian Auditor-General has said in his report that the Phoenix modelling has not been up to standard and that he is concerned about that Phoenix modelling. Can you provide an update on what the government is doing to ensure that really you are targeting the right sectors?

Chris HARDMAN: It was really difficult to track the hours. We have a manual system to pay the forest contractors. There was a significant delay. It was really challenging and difficult for some of those providers. I can take it on notice to let you know. That payment is progressing really well. We have put on additional resources to make those payments, and we do need to improve the system to make sure that we do not see that delay occur again in the future-We are happy to take all those on. We do have the data, and we will be able to provide that information.

Response:

Contractor payments:

Payment delays for fire response work occurred due to the significant number of large concurrent fires across the state, and the resulting numbers of deployment of externally-contracted plant. Coupled with end-of-life technology platforms, payment delays were experienced by some contractors.

Additional resources from across the state were quickly deployed to assist with remediation of outstanding payments. The bottleneck was cleared and all outstanding invoices paid.

Fuel management on public land:

Hectares treated by planned burning and mechanical fuel treatments is reported annually and can be found at OBRM reporting | vic.gov.au

DEECA's fuel management program is developed from the ground up based on burn nominations from local staff with deep, expert knowledge of the land and forests that they manage.

Importantly, modelling is used as decision-support, not decision-replacement. These tools help us understand how risk is distributed across the landscape and how different treatment options may influence outcomes — but they are always interpreted alongside professional judgement and local, on-ground knowledge.

Modelling does not replace local, on-ground expertise. Regional fuel management strategies were developed with operational staff who understand conditions on the ground and included significant community input. Operational seasonal decisions are made by experienced personnel responding to real conditions, not by model output.

All models have limitations. That is not a failure of the framework; it is the reality of managing bushfire risk in a changing climate. DEECA invests in a continuous improvement of fire prediction and modelling tools, alongside a large program of fire research and systematic fire reconstruction work to test modelling assumptions against real fires.

Additional questions

Melina Bath

Loss of Experience and Local Knowledge

1. Since the FFMV restructure, how many staff with long-term operational fire experience (20+ years) have exited, and what risk assessment was done on the loss of bushfire knowledge?

Organisational change processes have been designed to not adversely impact frontline emergency roles.

In the December 2024 BFS Group organisational change, there were 53 staff that held emergency management roles departed from the Department. These departures occurred via opt-in Applicant Separation Packages that provided pathways for career changes or staff nearing the end of their careers for early retirement. All applicants' specific fire roles and experience were considered in the decision-making on packages. For certain staff that held specific fire roles, their exit dates were postponed until after the bushfire season. To maintain critical workforce capability for FFMVic in future bushfire seasons, BFS Group also implemented the Seasonal Emergency Management Workforce Framework on 1 December 2024 (see below).

Furthermore, in the same 2024 change process, new roles were created which meant there was a net gain of 54 frontline roles for Forest and Fire Operations Officers. The only net reduction in operational roles was related to 4 regulatory positions that were no longer required following the end of native timber harvesting.

DEECA staff with an emergency role as at 6 January 2026 is 2,222 (Total headcount as cited in DEECA Annual Report 2024/25 is 5,735).

BFS Group developed a Seasonal Emergency Management Workforce Framework (the Framework) in 2024 to account for changes in resourcing

associated with organisational change processes. This was expanded in 2025 to include Parks Victoria and other DEECA Groups.

The Framework is designed to minimise impacts on emergency management capability and capacity and is intended to remain in place for 3 years.

The Framework is a structured process to identify capability needs for the summer bushfire season and the autumn planned burning period each year. It identifies casual and fixed-term seasonal employment opportunities to retain skills and experience to meet any identified short and medium-term gaps in emergency management.

In addition, a review of FFMVic's learning and development approach is underway to strengthen emergency management capability. This work focuses on improving the training, clarifying training pathways, and streamlining opportunities for staff to build and maintain critical skills. This supports the ongoing development of the workforce and helps ensure capability and capacity is further built and sustained across emergency management functions.

2. Does FFMV accept that the loss of experienced planners and operations staff has reduced local decision-making capability at district level?

FFMVic's emergency management resources such as planners operate at a regional level. Local resources at a district level are responsible for aggressive first attack on new fires. On days of heightened risk resources are prepositioned across the state to enhance regional response to protect Victorian communities. Capability is actively monitored and maintained through the FFMVic Standard of Cover (SoC), which assesses the number of suitably trained and endorsed personnel against required roles at district, regional and state levels. This provides an ongoing assurance that decision making capability is maintained across the system.

As a result, no resourcing pressures were identified.

FFMVic also runs an extensive preparedness program that regularly assesses capability requirements at all levels. In preparation for the increased forecast risk in the 2025/26 fire season, FFMVic ensured additionally appropriate resourcing capabilities above the requirements for an average fire season, were in place by implementing the following:

- The seasonal re-engagement of experienced personnel including Level 3 Incident Controllers and senior agency commanders at the regional level, to ensure capability and capacity across these critical functions.
- The pre-positioning of experienced emergency management staff to locations ahead of elevated fire risk days.

- Close collaboration and coordination with our partner agencies (CFA, EMV, SES and FRV).
- As the fire season progressed national and international systems were activated to request resources from other Australian jurisdictions and internationally. This year, all Australian jurisdictions, New Zealand and Canada provided crews and/or incident management personnel.

Together, these arrangements ensure that FFMVic maintains appropriate decision-making capability at the district level, supported by regional and state resources, rather than relying solely on locally based personnel.

District Capability After Restructure

1. Is FFMV aware that tasks that once took minutes now take significantly longer due to reduced staffing, loss of experience, and new systems imposed by the restructure?

2. Has FFMV measured the productivity and effectiveness impacts at district level from staff being required to cover multiple roles with less support?

These questions do not provide sufficient detail to enable a response.

Community Engagement Capacity

1. Why were district-level community engagement roles removed, leaving one person to cover entire regions such as Hume, and does FFMV accept this has weakened preparedness and community trust?

Engagement capability was centralised into regional Forest and Fire Engagement Teams to reduce duplication, improve consistency, and clarify accountability.

Each regional Forest and Fire Engagement Team is made up of engagement staff, supporting engagement with, and involvement of communities, stakeholders, partner agencies in forest and fire management in the regions and districts. There is a total of 18 engagement staff across the state, with teams of between 2 and 4 across each region. Engagement is a shared responsibility for all staff, not just community engagement focused roles, to ensure preparedness activities and community trust are maintained.

Fleet Servicing and Regional Impact

1. Does FFMV accept that regional crews are losing operational capacity because vehicles must travel hours to certified service providers, instead of using capable local mechanics?

Safety of FFMVic staff is paramount. Service providers must be certified to ensure that repairs are safe and compliant. In addition, surge vehicles are made available across the State to maintain fleet coverage during maintenance periods. Our service and repair processes are always subject to continuous improvement reviews. More local providers will be certified over the next six months, to broaden the network of regional providers. These will be in locations as close as possible to FFMVic depots.

2. Has FFMV calculated the true cost of fleet downtime, including transport costs and loss of crew availability?

The ultra-light G-Wagen fleet was offline for less than four months with all vehicles repaired, certified and return to operational readiness on 15 December 2025. During this period, alternate fleet options were identified including from sector partners within Victoria and across Australia. Across this period, the workforce continued planned activities without any material impact on their roles and responsibilities. The financial costs associated with fleet remediation are being reconciled as part of end of financial year processes.

G-Wagons – Safety and Cost

1. How many G-Wagons have been taken offline in the past 12 months due to safety issues such as cracked chassis?

Seasonal preparedness inspections identified chassis cracking on many ultralight tanker G-Wagen vehicles, resulting in a full stand-down of the fleet of 290 vehicles in October 2025.

In October 2025, FFMVic activated an accelerated repair and return-to-service program and expanded its pool of contingency vehicles to supplement the water carrying fleet capacity.

Once repairs were completed, vehicles were returned to work centres. The ultralight tanker G-Wagen remediation program was completed on 15 December 2025.

2. Can you confirm whether crews were ever instructed to operate G-Wagons that were known to be structurally unsafe?

Once systemic issues with G-Wagens were identified the Chief Fire Officer issued a directive to all staff that all vehicles were stood down and not to be operated until assessed, repaired and certified.

Post the stand down of the fleet, all vehicles were transported on flat top carriers to relevant repairers.

3. Why is FFMV continuing to spend heavily maintaining aging G-Wagons that are widely regarded by crews as unsafe and no longer fit for frontline use?

FFMVic acknowledges the age profile of the G-Wagen fleet and the challenges identified through the 2025–26 season. Continued investment in maintenance and remediation has been necessary to maintain operational capability and ensure vehicle safety while longer term replacement options are assessed. Following the identification of systemic chassis cracking, the fleet was stood down, repaired, certified and subject to strengthened assurance regimes before returning to service. In parallel, contingency vehicles were deployed to sustain frontline capacity.

Work has commenced on a replacement program for the G-Wagen; this includes the development of a new FFMVic Fleet Strategy and the trialling of new vehicle types to reduce the future reliance on G-Wagens. New designs for Falling Overhead Protection Systems for vehicles other than G-Wagens have also been developed which will enable the diversification of the fleet. There are complex legal and financial arrangements to be considered in this process.

Unimogs and Heavy Fleet Readiness

1. What is the current operational availability of Unimogs and other critical heavy fleet during peak fire periods, and have similar servicing delays affected their readiness?

The Unimog fleet of 59 vehicles is currently fully operational.

Fleet Strategy and Surge Capacity

1. Why has FFMV not formally transitioned G-Wagons into a limited surge-only role once made roadworthy, rather than continuing risky frontline use?
2. What is FFMV's long-term fleet replacement strategy to avoid ongoing safety risks and 'bottomless-pit' maintenance costs?

See response to Question 3 from Ms Bath on on G-Wagen – Safety and Cost.

Fuel Reduction Delivery

1. FFMV has reduced fuel on public land at about 1.2 to 1.4% per year under the current government why has FFMV consistently failed to approach the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendation of 5%?

See response to Question 1 from Ms Bath on Forward-Looking Reform.

2. Only around 65% of planned fuel-reduction coupes and approximately 25% of high-priority coupes are completed what are the primary reasons for these persistent delivery failures?

Over the past 5 years FFMVic has delivered an average of 59% of priority burns. Delivery of planned burns is subject to fuel, weather, climate conditions and consideration of community impacts.

The Joint Fuel Management Program is a state-wide program that manages fuel on public and private land over the next 3 years. As part of the JFMP more fuel management activities are planned than are able to be delivered to ensure flexibility in the program to accommodate for considerations such as weather and climate conditions.

3. Why does FFMV continue to focus fuel reduction predominantly near the forest–urban interface when major bushfires in Victoria are most often ignited by lightning in the untreated forest / state and national park country?

FFMVic works to deliver a fuel management program aligning to strategies and zoning available online at https://www.safertogether.vic.gov.au/strategic-bushfire-management-planning.

Zoning schemes incorporate management objectives. Asset Protection Zones provide the highest level of localised protection from bushfire; Bushfire Moderation Zones aim to reduce the size, spread and intensity of bushfires as they spread across the landscape; and Landscape Management Zones aim to prevent bushfires and support safe and effective suppression.

FFMVic operates across the whole of the public land estate in accordance with this zoning. Delivering the most intensive treatments near to assets and communities provides the best protection, but does not preclude FFMVic from delivering fuel management in remote locations to support first attack and suppression.

Residual Risk Targets and Modelling

1. FFMV operates under residual fuel-driven risk targets ranging from about 70% statewide to as high as 85% in some districts, do you accept these levels leave large areas close to catastrophic fuel conditions?

2. How does FFMV justify repeatedly exceeding its own district-level residual risk targets without mandatory corrective action or intervention?

Response to questions 1 and 2:

Regional long-term strategic planning targets guide FFMVic's achievement of the statewide 70% fuel driven bushfire risk target.

Fuel-driven bushfire risk targets are different for each region, depending on the landscape, topography, population and the contribution of each region's bushfire risk profile to the state-wide target.

Where fuel driven bushfire risk is higher than target levels in districts, FFMVic prioritises efforts in those districts to bring them back to target levels through prioritising resource allocation from across the state to these areas when there are opportunities to deliver burns. For example fuel-driven bushfire risk in the Hume Region at 30 June 2025 was at the long-term planning target of 69%. Within Hume Region, Ovens District's fuel-driven bushfire risk is above target at 62% (target 55%) due to unseasonably wet conditions for planned burning during the autumns of both 2022 and 2023. More favourable conditions saw the target reduced by 5 percentage points in the 2025 delivery season. Hume's three other districts, Goulburn, Murrindindi and Upper Murray are within target. FFMVic is addressing the Ovens District's risk status by:

- Enhanced readiness arrangements, including the use of the two rappel crews based at Ovens work centre.
- Prioritising delivery of the Ovens fuel management program in the 2026 autumn burn season, supplemented by resources from other districts as required.

Importantly, planned burning isn't the only way we reduce bushfire risk. Delivering mechanical fuel treatments, working with CFA on community awareness and preparedness programs and evacuation planning processes all help to prepare communities and reduce risk. Air and ground resources are also pre-positioned on standby in high risk areas and in high risk weather to enable aggressive first attack. These measures, and others, in combination help reduce bushfire risk.

3. Do you accept the Auditor-General's finding that the residual risk modelling underpinning Safer Together has significant limitations, including inadequate validation and incomplete data?

The Safer Together program is not a fuel management program: it supports Victoria's bushfire management sector to work together to implement Victoria's Bushfire Management Strategy (VBMS) through a range of activities that include community preparedness, planning, research, as well as fuel management.

DEECA uses a range of tools to assess the effectiveness of fuel management. This includes fire simulations using Phoenix, reconstructions and case studies of actual fires, and qualitative feedback from agency staff.

Bushfire simulators and other modelling tools, such as Phoenix, will always have limitations on their accuracy. DEECA continuously improves data and models and is working with other jurisdictions on the development of new simulators such as Spark, which is currently being trialled in Victoria.

Planned burning demonstrably influences fire behaviour, which gives firefighters a better chance to suppress fires and directly reduces the impact of fires on communities, infrastructure and the environment.

4. Why does FFMV continue to rely on Phoenix RapidFire modelling when it has not been systematically verified against real fire outcomes in Victoria's most severe fires, do you have any recommendations for government in relation to this?

Fire behaviour is complex and affected by a range of factors including terrain, fuel, wind, temperature and moisture. No simulator perfectly aligns with actual fire behaviour, including Phoenix.

Phoenix's performance has been assessed in a range of settings, including in peer reviewed journals such as:

- Fox-Hughes et al (2024), An evaluation of wildland fire simulators used operationally in Australia.
- Duff et al (2018), Conditional Performance Evaluation: Using Wildfire Observations for Systematic Fire Simulator Development

Fox-Hughes et al (2024) assessed the simulators Australia, Phoenix, Prometheus, and Spark. Each simulator showed strengths and weaknesses; no simulator was clearly superior to others in this evaluation.

At the current time, Phoenix remains the simulator best suited to operational use in Victoria.

Victoria is working with other jurisdictions on the development and testing of Spark, a next-generator simulator.

Fire Behaviour, Fuel Loads, and Suppression Limits

1. FFMV data and fire behaviour science show that fires burning in hazard heavy fuels routinely exceed suppression limits, why has FFMV not prioritised fuel reduction as the primary risk control, rather than relying on suppression, and what is inhibiting FFMV from expanding its delivery of mitigation efforts?

Fuel management and suppression are complementary, not substitutes for one another. Fuel management does not stop fires, but can moderate fire behaviour, reducing impacts and improving the likelihood of successful suppression. FFMVic's fuel management program aims to support the suppression of fires in line with the objectives of the Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land and the fire management zoning scheme.

2. Do you accept that fire intensities of 10–100 MW per metre, such as those experienced on Black Saturday and during recent fires, make suppression ineffective regardless of resources, and what limitations is FFMV facing to being further bushfire prepared?

There are circumstances which make it difficult or impossible to safely suppress fires. This can include fireline intensity. Weather conditions such as high winds may also preclude firefighters from carrying out direct attack.

Under these circumstances agencies will prioritise other strategies such as asset protection and information, warnings, and evacuations.

Part of the aim of FFMVic's fuel management program is to moderate fire behaviour and improve the chances of fires being successfully suppressed. Fuel breaks, roading, and management of hazardous trees also provide better opportunities for rapid access to the forest to enable firefighters to work safely to suppress fires.

3. Is it correct that hazard heavy fuels now occupy roughly 90% of Victoria's forest estate, and if so, what is FFMV's plan to reduce this risk within realistic timeframes?

'Hazard heavy fuels' is not a term used by fire agencies in Victoria therefor the question does not provide sufficient detail to enable a detailed response.

Supported by local knowledge, FFMVic plan and deliver fuel treatments to reduce risk by utilising a risk modelling system underpinned by the latest science and modelling. This approach considers if a potential fuel treatment could reduce the fire behaviour as a potential high impact fire starts, spreads or impacts communities or assets. Fuel hazard is an important input into this consideration however it is not the only consideration (e.g. potential fire weather, fuel moisture and fuel location relative to communities are all additional, and important considerations when FFMVic plan fuel treatments).

Refer to Mr Hardman's response to the second Question on Notice, responses to Ms Bath's third question Fuel Reduction Delivery, Ms Bath's second question on Residual Risk Targets and Modelling, and Ms Bath's third question on cost, efficiency and overheads for further background on Victorias approach to bushfire risk management.

FFMVic reports fuel driven bushfire risk annually, with most recent data available at https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/monitoring-evaluation-and-reporting/ffmvic-bushfire-risk-mitigation-update-2024-25.

Initial Attack and Access Failures

1. In the 2019–20 East Gippsland fires, ignitions burned for days under relatively mild weather, why was initial attack delayed, and what if any learnings did FFMV bring into operation prior to 2025/26 fire season and what recommendations would you make to government in relation to early response after ignition?

As the scope of this Inquiry is the 2026 summer fires across Victoria, FFMVic's response focuses on those events rather than earlier incidents such as the 2019–20 East Gippsland fires.

In 2024 FFMVic introduced a Statewide Model of Response (SMoR) to ensure a risk based framework for delivering a rapid, consistent and scalable bushfire response, centred on aggressive early first attack to keep fires small and prevent escalation.

Prior to the development of the statewide model of response, regions enacted their own suppression response models. These were based on the principles of aggressive first attack, weight of resources, and sustained, determined suppression efforts, including the use of specialist capabilities such as rappel crews alongside heavy plant and aviation assets.

This approach was supported by the development of regional readiness and response plans published ahead of each fire season. Furthermore, FFMVic would undertake an annual comparison against the standard of cover to identify capability and capacity issues, with a specific focus on short-, medium- and long-term gaps.

In addition, fires were allocated resources based the State Controller suppression priorities:

1. Protection and preservation of life
2. Incident stabilisation
3. Protection of critical community assets
4. Protection of environmental and cultural values
5. Community information and warnings
6. Effective and efficient use of resources

Aggressive first attack and keeping fires small is the most effective way to maintain firefighter safety, protect communities, preserve operational capacity, and minimise social, environmental and financial impacts.

2. Has FFMV assessed the extent to which neglected access tracks, limited containment line preparation, and delays in backburning have compromised suppression outcomes?

The question does not provide sufficient detail to enable a response.

Cost, Efficiency, and Overheads

1. FFMV spends only about a quarter of its total budget on fuel reduction, with overheads reportedly approaching 75%—do you accept this indicates poor efficiency in mitigation delivery?

The costs to deliver the fuel management program necessarily include both direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs relate to investment that can be directly and reliably assigned to individual fuel management operations (such as materials, plant and aircraft hire, overtime and allowances, overnight accommodation and meals). These costs are variable and are determined based on seasonal conditions and the types of planned burns being delivered.

Indirect fuel management costs (which could be considered the 'overheads') include expenses relating to salaries, training, vehicles, equipment, planning and community engagement. These are required to plan and maintain an effective fuel management program.

FFMVic works to deliver the fuel management program in accordance with the Victorian Governments target for bushfire risk under the Safer Together Program.

2. Why does FFMV's prescribed burning cost per hectare remain far higher than best-practice benchmarks achieved in south-west Western Australia?

Due to all the variabilities involved with the practice of prescribed burning, it is not reasonable to compare costs per hectare between states. Cost per hectare is not directly comparable between states because it is highly sensitive to differences in landscape, risk settings, burn objectives, regulatory requirements, access, workforce models and burn windows. These factors vary significantly between Victoria and south west Western Australia, meaning apparent cost differences do not reflect like for like activities or operating conditions.

3. What specific reforms has FFMV implemented to scale up prescribed burning efficiently, reduce overheads, and increase landscape-level treatment?

FFMVic's fuel management program is guided by regional Strategic Bushfire Management Plans. Strategic bushfire management planning is jointly delivered by Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), Country Fire Authority (CFA), Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), and local government in consultation with communities through the Joint Fuel Management Plan (JFMP). The JFMP was a major reform introduced to ensure risk reduction activities such as planned burning and mechanical treatment are planned efficiently, transparently and to ensure that the highest impact activities are prioritised to reduce risk to communities and infrastructure.

Strategic bushfire plans are updated every 5 years to reflect the latest science that guides the fuel management program.

Enhancements in our bushfire risk modelling ensure our efforts are targeted in areas of the highest risk to reduce bushfire risk to people, property and the environment.

The CFO issues annual directives aimed at focusing program planning and delivery, and sets priorities that include delivery of landscape management burns. In accordance with these directive FFMVic takes every opportunity to deliver its fuel management program. Importantly this includes a flexible funding model with government that allows DEECA to seek additional funding when seasonal conditions are favourable for an expanded fuel management program enabling DEECA to deliver bushfire risk reduction activities beyond its base funding capability.

FFMVic take every available opportunity to deliver fuel management activities and this means being agile in delivery methods and may look like focusing on non burn fuel treatments during poor weather or completing partial burns or burn preparatory works to prepare for the following season. All of these activities result in FFMVic delivering where it can depending on the conditions to reduce bushfire risk in Victoria.

DEECA's Bushfire and Forest Services group (including FFMVic) have undertaken structural reform to reduce duplication of operational planning functions between its 16 Districts and 6 regions.

Forward-Looking Reform

1. What would FFMV need, legislative authority, resources, structural change, to double its current approximately 1.2% fuel reduction program and in practice deliver a 5% annual fuel-reduction (in line with

2009 Bushfire Royal Commission Rec 56) program safely and efficiently?

More treatment does not automatically translate to less impact. The critical factor is not how much area is treated, but where treatment occurs and whether it interacts with the fires that threaten communities.

Targets also do not necessarily translate to treatments delivered. Fuel management is inherently weather dependent. Some years are too wet to burn; some years see protracted periods where it is too hot, dry, and windy to burn.

Victoria has never treated 5% of public land in any single year – the maximum single year delivery historically is approximately 3.2% of total public land. An average of 5%, factoring in years where conditions are infeasible to burn, implies the need to greatly exceed 5% in some years – e.g. burning 500,000 hectares in a single year.

Targets can provide focus and accountability, but they cannot make a wet forest burn.

Following the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, the independent Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor reports consistently questioned the 5% target approach annually from 2012-2014, including:

  - suggesting that a hectare target may diminish the states ability to focus on risk reduction in high risk areas,
- that it was not achievable, affordable or sustainable,
  - acknowledging calls to adopt a more strategic risk based approach
- that area based hectare targets alone will not necessarily reduce the bushfire risk to life and property in Victoria and may create perverse incentives and have adverse environmental outcomes.

Wendy Lovell

1. Were you satisfied in how your legislated responsibilities were executed by the States Command & Control Arrangements during the 2025/26 fire season?
    - If not, what would you have done different.
    - Why didn't you intervene?

Yes, Command and Control arrangements across the Department were well executed and led from a state perspective.

The Seasonal conditions forecasted led to preparedness for 2025–26 season being accelerated due to elevated risk, with state coordinated sector wide activities completed by 1 October 2025.

Furthermore, under challenging conditions across the 2025/26 fire season FFMVic crews:

- Contained 76% of fires at first attack (by 0800 the following day) and 87% of fires before they reached 5 ha.
- Deployed 2,685 individuals across more than 65,147 shifts (almost 682,000 hours of bushfire response) this season.
- Responded to 918 bushfires impacting 434,340 ha of public and private land.
- FFMVic specialist remote firefighting Rappel crews were deployed on 56 Missions to 22 remote and inaccessible fires this season.
- Based on the 2025/26 season and the extreme to catastrophic conditions experienced across Victoria, the Command-and-Control arrangements were well executed.