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BURNING FOR BIODIVERSITY OR BURNING THE BIODIVERSITY?

The Friends of Hoddles Creek ask Brad Battin MP to investigate.

Why was a Planned Burn lit in Hoddles Creek two days before a day of Total Fire Ban? The Environmental Group, Friends of Hoddles Creek have written to the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment and Local Member for Gembrook Brad Battin MP requesting a full investigation into an ecological planned burn conducted earlier this year within the Kurth Kiln Regional Park. The Burn in the Hansen Creek road area specifically targeted a section of the ecologically strategic wildlife corridor that forms part of the important Biolink between the Park and the nearby Beenak Bushland Reserve. Instead of a patchy mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas being the result- as was the ecological objective- the fire effectively burnt 100% of the area burning through non target gullies and fire sensitive mountain ash trees, decimating the few remaining remnant older trees containing the hollows so vital for the survival of our native fauna.

As the Burn was primarily an ecological burn rather than a fuel reduction burn the Friends have recommended to Brad that the investigation be headed by an independent professional fire ecologist. An ecological burn is conducted in order to protect or promote biodiversity or a particular ecological asset/s such as a rare or threatened species of flora or fauna.

Data provided to the Friends Group by Parks Victoria, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries and the Bureau of Meteorology indicates that:-

- For approximately 95% of the Burnt Area, planned burning was ecologically undesirable.
- Prior to the burn there was an ecologically desirable mosaic of different fire age classes (time since fire) for the Vegetation within the Burn Boundaries.
- The rainfall for the 6 months prior to the burn was the lowest ever recorded from the nearby BOM weather station. I.e. plants & animal were already under stress.

Mr Laurence Gaffney, spokesperson for the Friends Group said that *"the Burn was lit on Monday the 25th March with weather forecasts predicting a period of high temperature & high fire danger ahead."* A Total Fire Ban was declared for Wednesday 27th March 2013. Predictably the Burn did not go according to plan providing local residents with an anxious time as the fire picked up again in the hot weather, marginally crossing a control line.

The Friends Group have requested Brad Battin to investigate:-

- Why an ecological burn within both a Water Supply Protection Area and a Regional Park that has been specifically zoned for ecological fire management was lit under these conditions.
- What Plans were put in place in order to ensure the DEPI ecological burn coverage objective of 50% to 70% was achieved but not exceeded under these conditions?
- What the specific ecological objectives were for the burn and whether or not these were achieved. I.e. how is the ecological success of this burn to be measured?