



Minister for Environment and Climate Change

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8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne Victoria 3002
Australia
PO Box 500
East Melbourne Victoria 8002
Australia
Telephone: +61 3 9637 8890
Facsimile: +61 3 9637 8100
DX 210098

Ms Jill Redwood
Coordinator
Environment East Gippsland
Locked Bag 3
ORBOST VIC 3888

19 MAY 2014

Dear Ms Redwood

FIRES AND LOGGING PLANS

Thank you for your email dated 2 April 2014 to the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, the Hon Peter Walsh MP, and myself regarding fires and logging plans. As this matter falls within my responsibility as the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, I am responding on behalf of the Victorian Government.

The Victorian Government **takes the protection of our natural environment seriously**. This includes the challenge of managing the risk of bushfire and its impact on wildlife and plants within Victoria's forests.

After the recent bushfires in East Gippsland, the government **deployed a Bushfire Rapid Risk Assessment Team to the Goongerah Deddick Trail and Club Terrace-Goolengook River bushfires in East Gippsland to assess and prioritise impacts to biodiversity, built assets, cultural heritage, flooding and erosion, and forest management**. In response to this assessment, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries is taking action to address the impacts of bushfire. Actions include addressing **water quality** issues caused by erosion that are **affecting the unique aquatic species** found in the area, reducing the likelihood of **invasive plant and animal species from becoming established in the fire area, and reseeded areas of Alpine Ash forest that are unable to naturally regenerate after intense bushfire**.

To reduce the risks posed by major bushfires and optimise outcomes for values that are most important to local communities, the government is also **preparing strategic bushfire management plans** in consultation with local stakeholders. The Alpine and Greater Gippsland bushfire risk landscape plan is due for completion in 2015.

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The Victorian Government also recognises the impacts of bushfire on Victoria's native timber industry. VicForests announced a significant reduction in sustainable mixed species harvest levels for East Gippsland in its 2012 Resource Outlook. I am advised that this reflected past bushfires in East Gippsland, and previous government decisions that moved areas from timber production into parks and reserves. VicForests will continue to assess sustainable harvest levels as part of its annual Resource Outlook.

I encourage you to continue to be involved in consultation on future timber harvesting operations. As you are aware, the community has an opportunity to raise concerns about VicForests' planned operations during the Timber Release Plan community consultation period each year. This process is advertised in local papers and notification is provided to those on the relevant database. I recommend you liaise with VicForests regarding these arrangements.

As outlined in the Timber Industry Action Plan, the government is also developing a new strategic approach to biodiversity management in timber harvesting areas. The government invested \$1.86 million to support the development of this new approach, including new research to improve our information about key threatened species such as the Long-footed Potoroo in East Gippsland. The report, *A new strategic approach to biodiversity management – Research component*, can be found at: <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/threatened-species-and-communities>. Further details regarding the new strategic approach will be available later this year.

A review of the East Gippsland forest management zoning scheme was completed in 2011. Any subsequent review of forest management zoning in the East Gippsland area would not occur until after the reviews of the Central Highlands, Gippsland and North-east regional forest agreement areas have been completed.

Thank you for raising this matter with the government.

Yours sincerely



THE HON RYAN SMITH MP
Minister for Environment and Climate Change