

**Submission to
The Council of Australian Governments
Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management
from
Green Triangle Forest Products Limited**

Green Triangle Forest Products Limited (GTFP)

GTFP are one of four major softwood plantation growers within Australia's largest timber plantation growing region. GTFP own 20000 Ha of radiata pine plantations spread roughly 50:50 either side of the SA/Vic border. GTFP also own two large sawmills which currently cut around 650 000m³/annum of sawlog. This sawlog is supplied 60% from our own plantation resources and 40% from external suppliers such as Hancock Victorian Plantations, ForestrySA and small private growers. GTFP is active in the area of fire protection – in addition to being members of the Green Triangle Forest Owners Conference we are a registered brigade with both the CFA and the CFS. We run 5 tankers and additional back up support, we contribute to regional fire detection and maintain our plantations to a high standard to minimise the impact of fire on our business and our community.

While GTFP generally supports the submission of the Green Triangle Forest Owners Conference we would like to suggest a number of improvements to National Bushfire Mitigation and Management from our perspective:

Our Views

1. We support **consistent fire protection policies across all classes of land holdings** – it is inequitable to single out the plantation industry, all landowners have responsibilities in this area.
2. **Good prevention works, good planning, early detection and rapid suppression are essential:**
 - 2.1 Native forest management agencies (including National Parks) should be provided with adequate funding to **improve the level of fuel reduction burning** performed in National Parks and state forest. Where expertise does not exist within some organizations (National Parks) others (eg. state forestry organizations) could be contracted out to manage this aspect of their operations.
 - 2.2 Integral to successful first attack is early detection, rapid communication and vigorous response to fires. We would encourage further **research into remote sensing technologies to enhance early fire detection** and rapid response.
 - 2.3 The **first attack force must be highly mobile and responsive**, situated close to the assets it is protecting and have sufficient resources to be effective. Training and equipment must be suitable to ensure these operations are safe. First attack forces should be an appropriate combination of ground and airborne equipment – what is most cost effective will vary from region to region, depending upon access and fire fighting expertise. **Fire bombing services** in most circumstances will be

an important component of first attack forces, and must be widespread enough to have an impact in the first attack phase. For maximum cost effectiveness **many smaller aircraft** are likely to be better than one large capacity aircraft – the fire should be out before the centrally based larger aircraft can attend!

- 3 There is a risk that plantations are undervalued by some fire and emergency services organizations. Education of fire service personnel to **recognise that timber plantations are significant economic and community assets** is needed.
- 4 We recommend that a **National Country Fire Fighting agency** with regionalised management **be formed** to replace the current separate state based country fire fighting agencies. State based agencies duplicate each other's functions, create significant anomalies across state borders, and in doing so they increase the cost and reduce the effectiveness of fire management. A national legislative framework for this organization should supersede the various state based legislation. Some specific SA/Vic anomalies that need to be addressed include:
 - 4.1 Most fire and emergency services have changed frequencies and systems in recent years. Unfortunately the States have also developed systems that are incompatible with each other. In this area, Victoria and South Australia both have Government Radio Network trunk systems, which do not communicate with each other. This leads to duplication of equipment which has to function across border, but more importantly it may lead to confusion and communication breakdown in an emergency situation. A **national fire communications system** needs to be put in place.
 - 4.2 The CFA and the CFS have different minimum levels of accreditation in authorising fire fighters to attend fires. Fire fighters qualified in Victoria are not recognised in South Australia. Plantation companies also get very frustrated when fire services insist that their fire fighters need to be trained in modules (eg Structural Fires) which have no relevance to the fires that these people attend. National training packages with specialist modules for forest fire fighters need to be developed to ensure that there is a logical progression in training and qualifications from crew level through to Sector Commander, Divisional Commander and Incident Control for bushfires.
 - 4.3 Standardise conditions for fire season declaration and burning permits across state borders. This year fire season has been declared approximately one month earlier in the Lower SE of South Australia than in the South West of Victoria. These areas share a common local climate and a common boundary for over 50 Km. Yesterday we had an incident in SW Victoria where a fire was lit on an unsuitable day by a private citizen, who did not need a permit. Our company incurred considerable expense in attending and putting out this fire along with other agencies. We would advocate that a precautionary and standard approach be adopted nationwide.

- 5 In our region there are at least 8 government agencies and private companies with their own fire response structures, excluding CFA and CFS. These organizations are coordinated to a high degree by common membership of the Forest Owners Conference, but there is still duplication of effort and resources within these organizations when it comes to planning, preparedness and management of fires and fire protection. GTFP would be willing to participate in **forming a regional collaborative forest fire prevention organization** in partnership with the other 7 players if we could be assured that it was more cost effective and did not compromise our fire response in any way.

Such a model is working successfully in the operations of our sister company – Weyerhaeuser NZ, based in Nelson, New Zealand. Weyerhaeuser NZ joined with Carter Holt Harvey Forests Ltd, Tasman District Council and Nelson City Council to form the Rural Fire Network Limited in 1998. The Rural Fire Network manages fire response for all partners, including equipment, training and personnel. Such an organization could be the basis for the next improvement step in our fire fighting capacity. We recommend that such structures be investigated for areas such as the Green Triangle where multiple organizations have small-medium fire protection capacities. State governments could play a significant part in the formation of such organizations through the involvement of state owned forestry corporations and natural resource management agencies, the benefits being more cost effective and seamless regional fire protection response.

Conclusion

In general GTFP supports greater consistency and collaboration between fire management agencies at a national and regional level. We are willing to be involved in joint fire management agencies to support this. There is considerable duplication and non-alignment between fire organizations at the state and regional level - this could be overcome by significant re-structuring.

We support a pro-active approach to fire prevention and strong emphasis on vigorous first attack.

Please contact me if you would like any further information on this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Moore
Fire Coordinator
Green Triangle Forest Products Limited