

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE POSITION PAPER

The Liberal Nationals have listened to communities affected by this summer's devastating Victorian bushfires. They need practical solutions to support the massive rebuilding efforts required. These communities deserve answers about what more could have been done to better protect their lives and property. This is what the Liberal Nationals have called for to help these communities.

A CROSS-PARTY INQUIRY INTO THE DEVASTATING VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

The Liberal Nationals will move to establish a Joint House Select Committee Inquiry into Bushfire Preparation and Response in Victoria. This will be a transparent public inquiry that is independent and gives voice to the concerns of Victorians affected by the bushfires.

The Inquiry should include an examination of what impacts on life and property could have been prevented by actions before the fire and whether the response to the fire could have been improved, and make appropriate reference to the 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission and its recommendations.

COUNCIL RATES RELIEF

The Liberal Nationals are calling on the Andrews Labor Government to provide council rates relief over the next two years for residents who have lost homes and had businesses affected by Victoria's dreadful bushfires.

The rates relief should extend to local businesses that have been severely impacted for the same two-year period. This would include businesses in places like Mallacoota, Corryong and Omeo that have been severely impacted by the downturn in tourism, as well as primary producers who have lost stock and crops, and grape-growers and wine producers who have lost this year's vintage due to smoke damage.

IMPLEMENT THE VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON PLANNED BURNS

The Liberal Nationals are calling on the Andrews Labor Government to reduce bushfire risk and implement the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's (VBRC) hectare-based planned burns target, in addition to a revised residual risk reduction target.

After Black Saturday, the VBRC made a recommendation that the Victorian State Government should conduct planned burns on 5 per cent of public land per year to reduce bushfire risk. This equates to around 390,000 hectares per year. The Victorian Labor Government abandoned the VBRC recommendation on planned burns in favour of 'strategic burns'. Strategic burns should not be a replacement of hectare-based targets; strategic risk reduction and hectare-based planned burn target should go hand in hand.

The "Return of the Firestick" - an indigenous burning project - should be supported to train fire practitioners that can be deployed to collaborate, educate and practice cultural burning. This should occur in partnership with traditional owner groups, FFMV, the CFA and other landholders.

FREIGHT SUBSIDIES FOR FARMERS – DELIVERED!

The Liberal Nationals, together with Victorian Farmers, have succeeded in pressuring the Andrews Labor Government to deliver financial relief for farmers in the north-east and East Gippsland through freight subsidies as they work to recover from bushfire and years of drought.

SUPPORT FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF BOUNDARY FENCING – DELIVERED!

The Liberal Nationals have succeeded in securing a commitment from the government to cover half the cost of materials to replace boundary fences that sit between private property and state forests and national parks. The Labor Government has belatedly agreed to fund 50 per cent of the cost of boundary fencing on public land, but we are calling for the assessments to be done urgently so that the fencing can be fixed.

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AERIAL FOOD DROPS FOR WILDLIFE – DELIVERED!

The Liberal Nationals have succeeded in pressuring the Andrews Labor Government to deliver aerial food drops for wildlife in fire-affected areas of Victoria. The Victorian Labor Government was slow to act on aerial food drops for wildlife, but commenced food drops for wildlife following effective pressure from the Liberal Nationals.

DEDICATED FUND TO SUPPORT BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

The Liberal Nationals are calling on the Andrews Labor Government to establish a Bushfire Recovery Fund to assist affected communities to recover and rebuild. Given the Australian Government has committed \$2 billion and the NSW Government \$1 billion, the Andrews Labor Government should establish a Victorian Bushfire Recovery Fund with a minimum of \$500 million over the next two years.

The Bushfire Recovery Fund should provide for:

- Post bushfire clean-up and demolition programs, as well as rebuilding and replacing public and farm infrastructure lost or damaged as a result of the bushfires;
- Assistance for community recovery from bushfires, including grants for rebuilding community facilities;
- Environmental restoration work, including the re-seeding of forests and rehabilitation of affected flora and fauna;
- Support packages for local small businesses and tourism operators impacted by the bushfires, including specific tourism promotion campaigns for bushfire-affected areas; and
- Mental health support programs to help individuals and families through the aftermath of the devastating loss of life and property.

Victorians expect that the money allocated to the recovery and rebuilding of our communities is properly accounted for. It must be delivered directly to affected communities and not tied up in a new Labor bureaucracy or sourced through an increase in the Fire Services Property Levy or other additional impost on taxpayers.

RELEASE FUEL LOAD MAPS IMMEDIATELY

The Liberal Nationals are calling on the Andrews Labor Government to publicly release current fuel load maps without further delay and to commit to the annual release of fuel load maps ahead of every fire season.

Despite devastating bushfires this summer, the Labor Government is refusing to release critical information about where dangerous bushfire fuel loads exist across Victoria. Victorians deserve to know about the fuel loads present in their communities, and the hazards they present.

STATE PARLIAMENT TO HOLD SITTINGS IN BUSHFIRE-AFFECTED AREAS - UPPER HOUSE DELIVERED!

Michael O'Brien and Peter Walsh have written to the Premier, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and President of the Legislative Council to call for at least one sitting week in 2020 to be held in East Gippsland (Legislative Assembly) and north-east Victoria (Legislative Council).

Given the bushfires have caused major damage in parts of Victoria, it is only right that Parliament should visit these communities, provide locals with the opportunity to speak directly with political leaders and show practical support for local economies.

Notwithstanding Andrews Labor Government's resistance, in early February the Liberal Nationals were successful in convincing the Legislative Council to sit in the fire-affected communities of Victoria's north-east later this year.