



## Minister for Police and Emergency Services Minister for Bushfire Response

Level 16  
121 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne Victoria 3000  
GPO Box 4356  
Melbourne Victoria 3001  
Telephone: (03) 8684 7811  
Facsimile: (03) 8684 7810  
DX 210077

Our ref: MC/14/5793  
CD/14/434447

Ms Belinda Clarkson  
4 Felicia Rise  
DIAMOND CREEK VIC 3089

Dear Ms Clarkson

### **BUSHFIRE WARNINGS**

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 September 2014 addressed to the Premier of Victoria, the Honourable Dr Denis Naphine MP, regarding recommendation one of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's final report. As the matters raised fall under my portfolio responsibilities, I am responding on the Premier's behalf.

The Victorian Government has made major investments and reforms to the way Victoria prepares for, and responds to, bushfires, as part of its commitment to implement every recommendation of the Royal Commission. Warnings combined with fire danger ratings or other triggers, provide people with information so they can enact their emergency plans and also communicate the seriousness of a particular bushfire event.

Your assertion that the Government's bushfire system "appears to be based on misinformation ... specifically a **maximum 9 km/h bushfire rate of spread**" suggests that this is the only (or even most significant) factor relevant in determining community warnings. To extrapolate from this that the State's bushfire warnings system will be mismanaged is not a sustainable argument.

In his letter to you, the Emergency Management Commissioner referred you to specific studies by eminent fire behaviour experts concerning the fire and evidence presented to the Royal Commission that indicate the extreme variations in fire spread, particularly over short distances, due to a range of variable such as fuel loads, localised weather and terrain. This will always be the case during bushfires in Victoria. The potential impact of spotting and the outbreak of new fires affecting communities in the path of a fire front are of equal, if not greater significance, in determining the need for warnings to those communities.

While you are free to draw such conclusions as you choose from the information presented to you, I am satisfied that the community warnings issued by the fire agencies in Victoria are based on the best available science and modelling currently available. Decisions around warnings are based on a wide

range of factors beyond the simple spread of fire itself, such as road infrastructure, size and composition of communities, available firefighting resources, specific location and so on. Warnings are issued as early as possible and on a conservative basis.

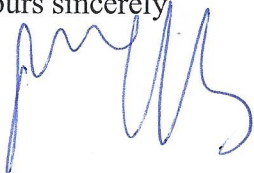
Victorians can receive information and warnings in a variety of ways , including the FireReady App, from the VicEmergency website, via 65 new Automatic Fire Danger Rating signs have already been installed across the state to inform travellers and local residents of the fire risk in their local area on days of high fire danger.

In order to avoid conflicting messages about bushfires, the government and fire agencies adhere to the 'One Source One Message' policy which ensures the same warning is disseminated through these multiple channels including emergency broadcasters, information lines, Facebook and Twitter.

No warning capability replaces the need for individual and community preparedness for emergencies. Victorians must not rely solely on one source of information during an emergency. Technology can fail – websites and apps rely on good internet access. Alternative sources of information include Victoria's emergency broadcasters, such as the ABC local radio, commercial and designated community radio stations, Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries websites, CFA's mobile website and social media channels, including Facebook and Twitter.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Yours sincerely



3/1/14

**KIM WELLS MP**  
**Minister for Police and Emergency Services**  
**Minister for Bushfire Response**

cc: The Hon. Dr Denis Napthine, Premier of Victoria  
Mr Craig Lapsley, Emergency Management Commissioner