

**Monday 15th March 2010 –**

## **Bushfire policy: do we need more than just an ounce of prevention?**

**There is too much focus in Australia on bushfire fighting and not enough on bushfire prevention, according to experts who have contributed papers to the latest edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* published by the Australian Farm Institute.**

Twelve months after the 2009 Victorian bushfire, Australian memories are indelibly marked by the loss of life and damage that occurred, and there has been a great deal of analysis of the adequacy of response to those fires by governments and Emergency Service agencies. However, there has been very little discussion about whether better management of fuel loads would reduce the future risk of similar bushfires occurring.

The February quarter *Farm Policy Journal* ‘*Bushfire policy: do we need more than just an ounce of prevention?*’ covers the issue of the role of land management as a precautionary approach to reduce bushfire risk. Articles in the Journal consider the role of fuel management and prescribed burning and explore the latest research and policies in this area.

*‘The event served as a fearsome reminder that once bushfires reach that degree of intensity, there is little that can be done to avoid cataclysmic destruction.’* said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

*‘A common theme through many of the papers is the perception that fire risks are increasing in many regions due to a number of factors, and that governments have a tendency to focus on high-profile investments in fire suppression resources, rather than in adequate fire prevention measures.’*

*‘In Australia, the focus on fire suppression rather than prevention has undoubtedly been encouraged by a combination of public discomfort with the smoke and ash associated with prescribed burning near densely settled areas, a lack of resources available to public land management agencies, and a prevailing view amongst some sectors of the environment movement that fuel reduction (through either burning or grazing) produces undesirable environmental damage.’*

*‘This is despite broad agreement about the historical patterns of fire in the Australian landscape over thousands of years, and the stark evidence of the cataclysmic damage that occurs to the environment and to property if heavy fuel loads remain unmanaged.’*

Journal papers include the following:

- **Taking responsibility for fire suppression and fuel management** - Phil Cheney, Honorary Research Fellow with CSIRO, former leader of the CSIRO Bushfire Research group
- **Bushfire, forests and land management policy under a changing climate** - Michael Stephens, Deputy CEO at the National Association of Forest Industries
- **Bushfire fuel management in Victorian forests** - Graeme Ford, Executive Manager of policy at the Victorian Farmers Federation
- **Land management and wildland fire: Looking forward, an international point of view** - Tom Harbour, Director of Fire and Aviation Management at the USDA Forest Service
- **About the research in physics for wildfires and its application to firefighting and prevention** - Albert Simeoni, Associate-Professor at the University of Corsica (France)
- **Forestry plantation and fire risk** - David Geddes, Director of Geddes Management Pty Ltd and forester with more than 37 years of experience

The February 2010 quarter *Farm Policy Journal* is available on the [Australian Farm Institute website](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/afin/).

**Ends** Media contact: Mick Keogh – (02) 9690 1388 or 0418 256 066