

# **AFFORESTATION OF HAINING FARM DON VALLEY**

## **Bushfire Risk Assessment**



**Prepared for**

**Yarra Waterways Group**

by

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary is largely a critique of papers put forward by the government in support of a proposal to afforest Haining Farm adjacent to the Don Valley residential estate, ostensibly founded on an assertion that the bushfire threat will not be increased, and consideration of related matters sourced by me.

The assertion that the bushfire threat will not increase seems to be based on the results of the application of a bushfire behaviour model that predicts probability of house loss: PHOENIX RapidFire. Unfortunately, vegetation or bushfire fuel loads that is species and concentrations were not available from Parks Victoria/DELWP, the principal proponents of the afforestation of Haining Farm, when this report was finalised. And, I understand from Yarra Waterways Group, the project owner, it was not for want of requesting this information.

A questionable feature of the bushfire risk assessment is the uniform percentage housing loss across a relatively large study area, questionable because it seems not to take account of what could only be an increase in bushfire fuel load given a Greening Australia statement that “over 315,000 trees and shrubs will be planted next year [2018], along with 100 different types of understory plants ...”

Given the lack of information available on vegetation species and planting concentrations proposed for the afforestation — and data used in the PHOENIX RapidFire modeling (?) — I consider a statement from one of the independent experts supporting the proposal incredible: “I do not consider the revegetation on Haining Farm to significantly change the bushfire risk in the Yarra Valley around Don Valley”.

Also questionable is the factoring in of emergency response firefighting resources, including firebombing aircraft, as integral to reducing any bushfire threat associated with the afforestation. Anyone with a real knowledge of bushfire occurrence, suppression difficulty and concentration of such resources according to the risk exposures will know that this is a promise that may not be able to be delivered when most required. Passive protection rather than reliance on emergency response should be the focus of Parks Victoria/DELWP, particularly with the exposed Don Valley residential estate adjoining to the east.

Minimising the bushfire threat posed to the adjoining residential estate is critical to minimising the potential for loss of homes, and in this case a school, due to the government’s urging the “go early” approach on the community that leaves homes without people available to deal with ember attack to supplement any fire brigade attendance.

When researching current bushfire protection arrangements for the Don Valley residential estate I was disturbed to find that there was no current Yarra Ranges Municipal Fire Prevention Plan according to section 55A Country Fire Authority Act 1958. I’ve heard of excuses that section 55A has been overridden by the Emergency Management Act or that is to occur. However, section 55A remains in the Country Fire Authority Act and I cannot imagine the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel Victoria allowing any conflict between Acts to remain, and to my knowledge other forms of instruction or advice do not override an Act of parliament.

From within the papers perused I have extracted the primary objectives for bushfire management on public land, including the statement “human life will be afforded **priority** over all other considerations”.

Having experienced the aftermath of several major bushfires, particularly the Trentham East–Macedon fire of Ash Wednesday 1983, Kilmore East and Murrindindi fires of 2009 and the Wye River–Separation Creek fire of 2015, it is reasonable to comment that very many people were hurt emotionally and/or financially through loss of homes, important and valuable possessions, including tools of trade, devastating to those affected — human life must be viewed more widely than just life loss or injury due to being caught in a fire.

Finally, the protection of the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater’s Possum should be able to be achieved without increasing the bushfire threat to the Don Valley residential estate and beyond.