Presentation by Rosemary Storey to Climate Café – November 2024

As one of countless people who fought to end native forest logging, I was devastated to learn that, post VicForests, our forests are as threatened as ever.

Two of these threats are so-called Strategic Fuel Breaks and so-called "fuel reduction" or planned burns.

Here it's worth noting that the use of fire by FFMV has little, if anything, in common with use of fire by traditional owners. Aboriginal people have who have spoken out against the White claims that their use of fire somehow reflects traditional burning. There appears to be no evidence of broadscale burning of forest by Traditional Owners.

These operations begin to make sense when you realise that most of the VicForests bureaucrats and logging contractors have been moved across to Forest Fire Management.

Their job is to smash out 6000 kilometres of so-called strategic fuel breaks by 2030. At about 40m wide, this is a greater area per annum than VicForests was logging.

And in some ways, it's even worse than VicForests' logging because:

(i) they include National Parks, and

(ii) there's even less regulation of ecological impacts than VicForests had.

Strategic Fuel Breaks let in more sun and create wind tunnels, drying out the forest and increasing fire risk. The name is misleading too. They don't "break" the advance of a fire. They just make it easier to do planned burns and light backburns during bushfires. This, despite the evidence that rather than suppressing the oncoming fire, often all backburns do is increase the fire footprint and severity.

What's wrong with planned burns or "fuel reduction burning"?

Repeated studies have shown that planned burns aren't much use for mitigating bushfires. They tend to **increase** the danger within a very few years because of the pulse of regrowth that follows. Some disillusioned firefighters have wryly re-named these "fuel **production** burns". There's ample research **now** showing that, as a rule, the more mature and undisturbed a forest is, the less flammable it is. This isn't particularly surprising when you think about it.

What **is** surprising is how little protection even very recent planned burns sometimes offer, especially in extreme conditions. Prof David Lindenmayer talks about being in Marysville in the months before the 2009 fires all but wiped the town out. He said you

could hardly see across the valley for the smoke from the planned burns being carried out in the forest all round. It's concerning to think that anyone might have failed to evacuate because of a false sense of security.

Planned burns directly kill wildlife, including threatened species, and the government's own study showed that a quarter of the hollow bearing trees reached by planned burns collapsed. With hollows taking 1-200 years to form and planned burns being carried out more and more frequently, the consequences for our many hollow-dependent species are grim.

In Victoria, burns planned for 2024 came to nearly a quarter of a million hectares. Next year will see a significant increase. This represents a lot of wildlife and habitat needlessly incinerated.

An extensive study of charcoal records showed that there's vastly more fire in the Australian landscape **now** than there was pre-colonisation. And we're making that worse.

In conclusion, this is my opinion.

If you are going to carry out operations to incinerate the bush, burning wildlife alive, destroying irreplaceable habitat and contributing to the climate emergency by releasing huge amounts of C02 into the atmosphere, you need to be very, very confident that the benefits outweigh the costs. Given the current science, *it's hard to see where this confidence comes from*.