

# Opinion

THE WEEKLY TIMES

## Timing of aid vital in healing

THE break in dangerous fire conditions this week is providing bushfire-weary communities a much-needed moment to take pause — but sadly, the true extent of the damage from the fire season thus far is only just starting to be revealed.

Authorities have confirmed more than 56,000 livestock have died so far, with more to come as assessments continue.

It's a heartbreaking figure, especially for the farmers for whom these animals are not just their livelihoods, but represent years of dedication, patience and care.

The Federal Government's agriculture package will be a vital component in the industry's recovery, not only essential to get affected farmers back on their feet, but to hopefully minimise collateral damage to other sectors.

But to do that, the Government will need to ensure any cash gets out to where it's most required, with as few delays as possible.

We know from previous experience — such as applications for Farm Household Allowance and concessional loans — that the burdens of bureaucracy can prove overwhelming for those already in dire straits, and prevent them from accessing services designed to help.

After a questionable start, the Prime Minister's response to the bushfires has ramped up, particularly since announcing the National Bushfire Recovery Fund. That urgency must continue for the next phase of agriculture's recovery from these devastating fires.

Just as vital will be the longer-term response. The full impact of these fires will not be known for some time and as such, how agriculture and regional Australia builds from here is a question that deserves careful consideration.

Now comes the terrible cost of ignoring clear warnings made 30 years ago

# The guilty must pay



Policy making on bushfire risk was either reckless or incompetent, but either way must not go unpunished, writes **CHRIS NIXON**

THE long-term green policy of allowing the Australian bush to be left alone to become an overgrown mass of tinder has led to the current situation.

Lives have been lost and countless animals — both farmed and native species — will die at the hands of the green agenda.

Thirty years ago, dire warnings were made by the people who had witnessed the 1939 fires in Victoria — that unless the bush was managed appropriately, Victoria would burn again.

And it is.

The restrictions placed on private land managers in preparing for the fire season and the complete lack of responsible management of public land has to be placed at someone's feet.

Australia has always had bushfires. Climate scientists from the Australian National University have predicted for the past 30 years that a changing climate with lower humidity would risk greater fire intensity.

Yet governments have reacted to interest groups and have diminished

fuel reduction burns or abandoned them all together.

The introduction of "risk"-based fuel reduction burns has led to excessive fuel loads in large tracts of the bush and a buffer zone is too inadequate to deal with the increased fire intensity.

A fire once started in these excessive fuel zones becomes a roaring howling beast that bears down and devours all in its path, putting our small communities at risk.

Having had the risk of lethal fuels identified by the scientists, and governments acting in the opposite direction, therefore escalates the problem.

They are either incompetent or reckless in the extreme.

The results of these poor policy decisions are now too painfully obvious with four confirmed dead and more than one million hectares burnt in uncontrolled wild fire and counting.

The cost to the community, social fabric and environmental damage is too large to calculate at this stage.

Those advocating these policies and those responsible for instigating these poor policies should be held to



**Warnings ignored:** The abandonment of fuel reduction burns has dramatically raised the risk of massive bushfires near populated areas.

account. They should be charged with culpable manslaughter given the tragic loss of life that has occurred.

Workers have the right to come home safe to their families.

Residents also have the right to be

safe in their homes. During this fire crisis in East Gippsland we have had neither.

• **Chris Nixon is a farmer from Orbest**

## Hold the flattery, give volunteers fire equipment

POLITICIANS need to end the hypocrisy of branding our CFA volunteers as "heroes", then leaving them feeling under-resourced and abandoned as the ashes cool.

Volunteer stations are falling apart, the CFA fleet is the oldest in Australia and a third of trucks cannot be taken to major fires.

Volunteer moral is already at an all-time low, thanks to Premier Daniel Andrews' carve-up of the CFA, as he blindly delivers on his promise to expand United Firefighters Union boss Peter Marshall's membership and empire.

Imagine what it's like for volunteers going out on deployment, de-



CFA volunteers need new trucks, stations and support, not a pat on the head and a minute of applause, says **PETER HUNT**

fending homes and lives against the fury of yet another round of major fires, only then to come home to run barbecues and beg for donations to buy a new truck, pump or other gear.

What's even more painful for volunteers is that while their fleet funding has stagnated at about \$14 million, the Government has forced the CFA into deals with the UFU that squander millions on recruiting an additional 450 UFU career firefighters,

lift their allowances by 19 per cent and invest even more in new career stations and appliances.

Treasurer Tim Pallas has blindly followed his Premier's and Marshall's demands, pouring \$10.5 million into new CFA career firefighters stations at Craigieburn, \$5.8 million for another at Lucas, \$5 million at Morwell and \$8.2 million at Armstrong Creek, which has eight bedrooms. The end result is that while volunteer resour-

ces decline, the CFA's expenses have blown out by \$135 million, to \$635 million in just four years.

Of course all of these new integrated stations, along with 34 others, will be taken off the CFA and merged with the MFB to form the new Fire Rescue Victoria service this year, leaving volunteers wondering just how much resourcing they will be left.

So next time you hear Mr Andrews praising volunteers, send him an email at [daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au) or jump on his Facebook or Twitter @DanielAndrewsMP to let him know what you think.

• **Peter Hunt is The Weekly Times senior reporter**

## LET'S BE POWER PREPARED FOR SUMMER

At AusNet Services we're working hard to keep the electricity network safe and reliable.

We plan ahead for summer when the grid can be put under greater pressure. But outages will still happen.

That's why it's important we're all power prepared this summer.

A little bit of planning goes a long way. On those really hot days

- **Keep** your mobile phone fully charged and have some spare batteries for your radio so you can still get alerts.
- **Know** how to manually operate your garage door.
- **Check** on those around you who may be vulnerable and sensitive to heat.

Let's work together to be power prepared this summer.

For more tips head to [www.ausnetservices.com.au](http://www.ausnetservices.com.au)

