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# Bairnsdale Advertiser

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2014

## Warnings are out of whack

**Bairnsdale residents could be caught by a catastrophic bushfire without timely warnings this summer.**

Such a prediction comes from former Nillumbik Shire councillor, Belinda Clarkson, a campaigner for bushfire fuel reduction burning and adequate warnings.

Ms Clarkson told the *Advertiser* that if a fire like the Kilmore East blaze on Black Saturday 2009, was sparked at Dargo in the morning, Bairnsdale could face catastrophe by late afternoon.

And the problem is the State Government's maximum hourly rate of spread for bushfire is severely underestimated.

"With the Victorian Government's reliance on a maximum hourly rate of spread of nine kilometres per hour, there may not be good reason to warn the people of Bairnsdale to evacuate," she said.

"However, with the Federal Government stating the maximum hourly rate of spread is 24km/h, evacuating Bairnsdale would be crucial.

"Put simply, in my opinion Bairnsdale will not be safe next summer unless the Victorian Government makes informed decisions about the rate of spread of extreme bushfires."

On September 16, Ms Clarkson wrote to Premier Denis Napthine suggesting the state's extreme bushfire warning system appeared to be based on misinformation.

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## Misinformation spells disaster

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"Specifically, a maximum 9km/h bushfire rate of spread is less than half that of a better informed Federal Government minister's (Ian Macfarlane) 24km/h," Ms Clarkson said.

Ms Clarkson referenced a letter from Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley on September 10, which she suggests the Royal Commission's top warning recommendation will be mismanaged.

She also highlighted that Mr Lapsley had referenced a "misinformed" quote of '9km/h - the fastest it would get'.

"The 'Royal Commission ... map of fire spread' indicates a rate of spread of 44km/h. That is nearly 500 per cent greater than your Commissioner's misinformed quote," Ms Clarkson told the Premier.

The Premier responded on Monday (September 29), saying he had referred the matter to Police and Emergency Services Minister, Kim Wells. Dr Napthine's response did not dismiss the claims.