



Media Release

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Active and adaptive forest management key to addressing ecosystem decline

The peak organisation representing some 1,000 scientific and professional forest land managers in Australia has told the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria that only active and adaptive land management supported by collective community action can address ecosystem decline directly and effectively.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia and Australian Forest Growers (IFA/AFG) Vice President Dr Michelle Freeman and CEO Jacquie Martin presented to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria Committee today, saying active and adaptive forest management informed by science and practical experience was required to mitigate the impact of climate change on Australia's Ecosystems.

"Society has modified our environment to such an extent that we can't now expect that if left alone forests can simply recover from the effects of key threats," Dr Freeman said.

"The greatest, most pervasive threats to our forest ecosystems are invasive species; change in land use and the increased frequency and intensity of bushfire, which are being exacerbated by climate change and will not be improved by passive conservation techniques.

"A commonly heard narrative is that creating more National Parks is needed to protect our forests. But invasive species, fire and other climate change impacts do not honour tenure boundaries. Our National Park estate has increased by over 500 per cent since 1970. Yet we are still seeing declines and there are numerous failings in forest management policy across the board that will not be solved by simply creating more reserves.

"Any response to the challenge of restoring and maintaining forest ecosystem health and resilience must include active and adaptive management of all forests, across all land tenures to address these threats.

"Year-round management actions such as promoting and supporting forest health and diversity, more strategic fuel management interventions, maintaining roads for access and protection as well as intervention to manage pests and diseases are all critical aspects in need of attention.

"We also need to recognise that the disproportionate focus on bushfire response and investment in aerial firefighting capacity, rather than effectively resourcing preventative mitigation strategies and rapid first-attack responses is putting ecosystem processes and biodiversity at risk.

"Our recommendations call for a more holistic, broader, cross-tenure approach to strengthen systems already in place, develop new systems, and arrest further ecosystem decline. This will require vision, creativity, collaboration and persistence supported by sufficient resources.

"Forest scientists have a critical and ongoing role to play because as scientists, with extensive practical experience, we have unique and special expertise in these areas.

Dr Freeman said increased employment, engagement and collaboration with Indigenous Landowner Groups would help improve active land management techniques.

"Active forest management is heavily reflected in traditional Indigenous land management practices, but we need to take more advice from the Traditional Owners of the land if we are to arrest ecosystem decline," Dr Freeman said.

"Prior to European settlement, Indigenous Australians carefully managed and preserved our land for tens of thousands of years. While many aspects of ecosystems have changed since then, the philosophies and principles of Traditional Owners remain relevant, and it is past time that we listen and integrate their lived experience into forest and landscape management."

IFA/AFG's Key recommendations to the Inquiry include:

- Our forest management vision and objectives must be clear – including defining a baseline ecosystem benchmark and establishing an accountability framework through which we can meaningfully assess decline and reversal as management actions are implemented,
- We need to employ and engage with Traditional Owners, respect their knowledge and experience, as well as participate in two-way capacity building, so that their land management philosophies can be re-introduced,
- We need to actively apply an adaptive management approach, including employing restoration silviculture to shape particular forest outcomes into the future, regardless of tenure,
- We need proactive management of fire risk including strategic use of prescribed burning, maintaining forest access including strategic fire breaks and mechanical interventions such as thinning where appropriate and,
- We need to shift our forest conservation strategy from simply creating more protective areas to a broader strategy of targeted management actions designed to specifically address major threats to our forests and biodiversity

Submission to the Inquiry in Ecosystem Decline in Victoria is available [HERE](#)

ENDS

Media contact:
David Abbott
Font PR
0400 446 736

Institute of Foresters of Australia
Level 1, 148 - 152 Miller St, West Melbourne, VIC
3003
Phone: (03) 9695 8940
[Unsubscribe](#)

