

Fuel reduction burning – protecting our communities

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The Plan to rebuild essential services

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Fuel Reduction - \$28 million to protect our communities

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will invest an additional \$28.5 million in a comprehensive and strategic state-wide fuel reduction program.

This investment will allow fuel reduction burning in Tasmania to be increased to 60,000 hectares per year*, which is roughly five percent of the “treatable” public land in Tasmania.

Unlike Labor and the Greens, the Liberals understand the critical importance of fuel reduction burning to reduce the risk of bushfire to property and lives.

New Fuel Reduction Unit

A majority Liberal Government will replace the current fragmented fuel-reduction approach, which is split between Parks, Forestry Tasmania, and the Tasmanian Fire Service, with **a new centralised and dedicated Fuel Reduction Unit**.

At full implementation, the new Fuel Reduction Unit will employ up to 70 personnel with a dedicated focus on fuel reduction. This approach is consistent with the recommendations put forward to the Government own expert State Fire Management Council in early 2011, and subsequently rejected by Labor for political reasons.

This will allow a significant increase in fuel reduction burning, to reach the recommended annual target of five percent (roughly 60,000 hectares) of treatable public land, each year.

Fuel Reduction First

44 percent of treatable land is in private hands, and it is vital that private land holders are encouraged to undertake fuel reduction on their land, not discouraged by overly prescriptive regulations or the threat of litigation.

Currently, private landowners seeking to undertake fuel reduction burns have to negotiate a maze of permits and legislation, including the *Threatened Species Protection Act*, *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act*, the *Nature Conservation Act*, Forest Practices Code, and local government by-laws.

* Forestry Tasmania press release, 23/12/2010.

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A majority Liberal Government will make it much easier for landowners to undertake fuel reduction burns on their own property, with a “fuel reduction first” policy.

Under this policy, we will reverse the onus of proof when it comes to environmental impacts, and require it to be proven that a fuel reduction burn will have an adverse environmental affect for a permit to be denied.

We will also work to change the culture within Government, the bureaucracy, and the wider community, in favour of fuel reduction burning.

No one likes fuel reduction smoke or the temporary eyesores that fuel reduction burning can create, but the simple fact is that a little smoke in autumn or spring is far preferable to a devastating summer bushfire.

There is no need for any more reports, what we need is urgent action, and that is what a majority Hodgman Liberal Government will deliver.

The Labor-Green failures on fuel reduction

In March 2011, the State Fire Management Council provided comprehensive advice to the State Government, recommending an additional investment in fuel reduction burns.

Unfortunately, Labor and the Greens rejected this advice, instead providing just \$400,000 for yet another study into fuel reduction burns – a study that didn’t even start until nearly two years later, and which still has not been completed.

In response to the tragic 2009 Victorian bushfires, the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that five percent of public lands be subject to fuel reduction burning each year.

However, under Labor and the Greens, the amount of fuel reduction burning hasn’t even come close to this target.

From 2005-2010, only 16,861 hectares of the 1.5 million hectares of forest managed by Forestry Tasmania was subject to fuel reduction burning – **that’s just 1.12 percent cumulatively over six years***.

And in 2011, the amount of fuel reduction burns undertaken by Parks declined by a staggering 94 percent**.

This culminated in the devastating 2013 bushfire season in Tasmania, which saw the loss of hundreds of houses and tens of millions of dollars of damage.

* Information provided to Parliamentary Questions on Notice.

** Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment Annual Report, 2012.

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Costings

Capped at \$28.5 million over four years