



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Bushfires take a heavy toll on Western Australia's forests**

Foresters have expressed concern at serious damage to environmental, recreational and commercial forest values caused by a series of recent large bushfires in Western Australia. The largest of these fires burnt more than 98 000 ha of karri and jarrah forest and threatened the Northcliffe community for a number of days. A second large fire burnt 52 000 ha in the north-eastern jarrah forest and destroyed the historic Long Gully timber bridge which was a favourite of walkers on the long distance Bibbulman walk trail. Several weeks earlier a fire at Bullsbrook burnt more than 500 ha of valuable pine plantation at Gnangara and Pinjar north of Perth, with serious implications for the long term supply of logs to a processing facility producing value-added engineered wood products.

"These fires have burnt on a scale not seen for more than 50 years in Western Australian forests" said Institute of Foresters WA Division bushfire spokesman John Clarke.

"Intense summer bushfires threaten lives and property and cause serious disruption to the community through closure of roads and damage to utilities such as electricity and telecommunications. The large bushfire in the southern forests has closed the South-West Highway for more than two weeks, forcing local residents and tourists to make long detours. These fires have also caused serious damage to productive stands of regrowth forest that are vital for a long term sustainable timber industry in native forests. In addition, the large scale and high intensity of these fires has impacted on conservation values with iconic forest-dependent species including the Quokka and Forest Red Tailed Black Cockatoo displaced through loss of habitat. These species may take years to recolonise severely burnt areas."

"Foresters recognise that fire is a natural element of the Australian bush and is important for regeneration and renewal of forests. However, fire must be managed and this requires an experienced and well-resourced workforce led by professionally trained land managers. Cutbacks in staff numbers and budgets have left State government agencies responsible for forestry and national park management with a seriously weakened capacity to manage forest fires."

"Furthermore, the Government must re-affirm its support for and commitment to a program of prescribed burning to reduce forest fuel build up. The benefits of prescribed burning in reducing the scale and intensity of bushfires have been demonstrated over many decades, and have a solid foundation in science. Prescribed fire also protects water catchments and contributes to maintaining a diversity of habitat for plants and animals."

The Institute of Foresters is a national organisation that represents the views of forest management professionals and has more than 120 members in Western Australia who work in native forests, plantations and environmental services.

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