



## Media release

### Foresters support Waroona bushfire inquiry

Western Australian foresters have welcomed the appointment of Euan Ferguson to conduct an independent inquiry into the devastating bushfire that affected Yarloop, Waroona and adjoining communities in January 2016.

‘Mr Ferguson’s background as a professional forester and fire fighter will stand him in good stead to investigate the fire and the way it was managed,’ said John Clarke, bushfire spokesman for the Western Australian Division of the Institute of Foresters. ‘Mr Ferguson has extensive experience in managing bushfires, has held senior positions with rural fire authorities in South Australia and Victoria and is widely respected as a leader and strategic thinker.’

The Institute of Foresters believes that the inquiry should pay particular attention to land management that may have contributed to the scale, intensity and difficulty in controlling the fire during its initial run on 6 January. The fire burned through State forest, heavily disturbed as a result of bauxite mining operations. ‘Fragmentation of native forest within the Willowdale minesite has made it impossible to undertake effective broadscale fuel reduction burning in this area for several decades’ said Mr Clarke.

Changes in land use on the coastal plain are also likely to have contributed to the large size of the fire. ‘Agricultural land uses have changed in the past decade following the termination of open channel irrigation and many properties now include dryland farming which will carry fire during the dry summer months’ said Mr Clarke. ‘The network of channels and drains act as wicks that allow a bushfire to spread very rapidly through the landscape. There is clearly a need for better management of fuels in remnant vegetation on the coastal plain, particularly close to settlements and main roads.’

The Institute of Foresters has previously expressed concern at the growing number of large and damaging summer bushfires in south-west Western Australia. Bushfires are having severe impacts on forested water catchments, commercial tree plantations, productive regrowth forests and a wide range of forest amenity values important to the community. Native animals and birds are also adversely affected by large summer bushfires. ‘This trend must be reversed, with greater emphasis placed on bushfire prevention and mitigation activities on all land tenures’ said Mr Clarke.

The Institute will present a written submission to the inquiry.

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**The IFA is Australia's professional body for foresters and other forestry professionals**