



Media release

Foresters call for Wye River fire inquiry

The Victorian Government should examine the lead-up to the Wye River and Separation Creek bushfire disaster according to professional foresters.

Gary Featherston, Chairman of the Victorian Division of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, has called on the Andrews Government to examine the fire-fighting efforts directed at the Jamieson Track lightning strike prior to Christmas Day.

'Experienced foresters find it hard to comprehend that a small, lightning-caused fire in relatively accessible forest, could not be contained after five days of benign weather conditions before Christmas.

'We acknowledge that property losses could have been far worse if not for the high quality of the emergency response on Christmas Day. However, focus on this response has obscured "the elephant in the room", i.e. how did the initial fire at Jamieson Track, about 8 km north of Wye River, grow to be such a problem in the first place?'

Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner, Craig Lapsley, has blamed the inability to quickly control the Jamieson Track fire on difficult country and heavy fuel loads from 50 years without fire. However, foresters experienced in fire-fighting say that the area is no more inaccessible than country in East Gippsland and NE Victoria where multiple lightning fires are common, and are typically controlled quickly.

Gary said, 'The Victorian Government rightly initiated an inquiry into a fire which destroyed five houses at Cobaw in October. However, in view of the much greater losses at Wye River and Separation Creek (116 houses, \$50 million in insurance claims, and a massive hit to the local tourism sector) Premier Andrews must not delay in setting up an independent inquiry into the pre-Christmas fire-fighting efforts at Jamieson Track'.

'The Victorian public needs to be made aware of the practical and cultural aspects of forested land management which affect the capacity to effectively control forest fires, rather than continually being told that devastating bushfires are just an unavoidable consequence of climate change,' said Gary.

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