

24th November 2023

Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill
GPO Box 123
Hobart TAS 7001

Email: FES.Reform@dpfem.tas.gov.au

TFPA Submission: Draft Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill

The Tasmanian Forest Products Association (TFPA) welcomes the opportunity to make comment to the Draft Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill.

The TFPA is the peak body for forestry that undertakes policy development, lobbying and advocacy for members interests. TFPA represents all elements of the value chain from the sustainable harvesting of plantations and multiple use natural forest resource including forest establishment and management, harvesting and haulage, processing of timber resources and manufacture of pulp, paper and bioproducts.

Background

Bushfire is part of the natural history of Tasmania and continues to be a feature of the landscape, as it does for many parts of Australia. Fire is one of the most important factors in the ecology of Australian forests. It is an essential element of the Australian natural environment that cannot be removed and is integral to maintaining environmental processes.

Fire management is not just about a public response to fire. It jointly involves state agencies and private landholders taking action to prevent fires from starting and knowing how to reduce the impact of fire, as well as jointly fighting fires when they break out.

Section 34. Fire permits

The TFPA agree that fire permit officers be appointed by the TFES Commissioner and that fire permit officers may issue a fire permit, in the prescribed manner, in respect of the area for which they were appointed.

Further information should be added regarding a permit application, issuing of the permit and review process. Importantly, there must be a structure for state-wide coordination and management of the fire permit system. This structure needs to have appropriate mechanisms for communication between fire agencies.

Section 35. Days of total fire ban

The forestry industry has taken the step of risk-based self-regulation, as highlighted in Blake Review Final Report, which are subject to overarching controls such as total fire bans.

The Fire Prevention at Forest Operations Procedure outlines the minimum fire requirements for forest operations and procedures to follow to reduce the risk of fire including on days of total fire bans.

As per clause (2)(a) of the draft Bill, we are assuming additional detail will be provided in the Regulations to declare the Fire Prevention at Forest Operations Procedure applies to this section.

Part 4 TFES Funding

As per our response to the Blake Fire Service Act Review, we agreed that the insurance levy needs to be replaced with a more equitable and sustainable levy. The current prescribed levy is an additional impost on those forestry businesses who take out insurance of up to 28% on top of their insurance premiums.

The TFFPA acknowledges the current funding model is not sustainable given the widely accepted wildfire science predictions of more extreme wildfires and fire weather, and uncertain fire seasons.

Our member businesses are major stakeholders in the management of fire in the Tasmanian landscape through a proactive approach to fire, land, and asset management practices.

Working towards a sustainable funding model needs to consider the work and investment undertaken by private forestry businesses to reduce fire risk. This includes fire breaks, fuel reduction burning, fire monitoring (from staff and contractors to sensor technology), water storage and sprinkler systems, fire equipment, and sharing of resources with TFS and agencies like Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

A system built on the premise of those who are showing intent in managing fire risk should be rewarded through an appropriate levy rate. Showing intent may include having an up-to-date fire management plan; those having the infrastructure and resources to minimise the spread of fires on their land or business; and those undertaking fire risk management activities, like fuel reduction and fire breaks.

Private forestry staff for the 2022/23 fire season undertook 589 hours of general firefighting activities and were on standby for 6,684 hours. This demonstrates the dedication of forest managers towards forest fire safety and prevention, which also has the flow-on benefit to the public.

The Tasmanian forestry industries also manages one of the largest private fire fighting forces in the State, which works closely with state agencies not only during fire season, but also in preparedness measures.

This cost is not insignificant. One of our members estimates that they spend around \$500,000 annually on fire fight measures. Across the entire industry, that cost would be in the millions.

We appreciate the recent decision by the Minister to reassess the funding model and we would like any restructure to be sensibly costed, and that any subsequent levy readjustment is equitable.

Equity considerations should include recognition of land managers and businesses in regional areas who are currently burdened with the cost of fire mitigation, despite the benefits to the public, particularly those in urban areas who enjoy the protection of all the natural values and services provided by private landowners.

TFPA emphasizes that a future sustainable funding model should provide incentives to those who are actively engaged in investment in an integrated fire management approach. We believe there is an opportunity to improve the efficiency and efficacy of Tasmania's fire management and subsequent risk profile by offering incentives to proactive and responsible landowners and businesses.

TFPA want to see an equitable payment for levies for those who are undertaking fire risk management for the benefit of their neighbours and community, and the State.

Section 59. Offences by owners or occupiers of premises

Clause (3) of this section relates to the owner must not fail to take all reasonable measures to prevent the fire from escaping the premises.

The TFPA agree with this, on the basis that private plantation managers are given all the necessary tools to assist them to undertake this measure. This must involve having access to the new Tasmanian Government Radio Network, including the necessary devices.

We request this on the basis that TFPA plantation grower members are managing over 400,000 hectares of forest in Tasmania and are custodians of a vast segment of our State's land mass, acting as a "first responder" at times of fire crisis on their estate.

Section 61. Offences relating to fire permit periods

Clause (2) states the owner can't cause to ignite matter within 6 metres of prescribed material, prescribed vegetation or prescribed items, however no definition or reference to prescribed material, vegetation or items.

TFPA ask that a definition or reference is provided for prescribed material, prescribed vegetation and prescribed items.

Section 86. Regulations

Without examining the Regulations in conjunction with the TFES Draft Bill, it is difficult to support the TFES Draft Bill.

This is important where, for instance, the Regulations may involve matters that involve liability, such as permit application, approvals, and review, and may involve consequences, such as penalties.

For complete fairness and equitable cost recovery, the TFPA urges the inclusion of formal recognition of the millions spent by the forest industry in fire management, over and above the costs borne by other industries in the State.

The TFPA look forward to further discussing the Draft Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill, as the process of further review, and implementation is undertaken.

Yours sincerely,



Nick Steel

Chief Executive Officer

TFPA represents forest growers, harvesters, and manufacturers of timber, wood and fibre products.