

Mr Tony Abbott
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

20 January 2015

Dear Prime Minister,

Australian disaster grants for extreme bushfires in Victoria

Thank you for your response to my letter (9/11/14 [Att. 1](#)). Your letter states "*Under Australia's constitutional arrangements, state and territory governments have primary responsibility for ...public warnings, using the best science and modelling information available*" (22/12/14 [Att. 2](#)).

Of critical importance to other Australian States and Territories, your letter appears to confirm that Australian disaster grants will effectively make them pay possibly tens of billions of dollars, based on the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (Final Report, Volume 1, page 345).

With the greatest respect, would you please instruct Victoria that its responsibility under Australia's constitutional arrangements is to use the best science available, and not an apparent erroneous construct of that science.

The sequence of Victoria's apparent erroneous construct of the best science, is as follows:

1. In 2012 the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) released a paper on Black Saturday's Kilmore East extreme bushfire, which acknowledged "*...high surface fuel loads, long unburnt...*" and stated "*...one could say the fire spread 24 km in an hour*" (2012 [Att. 3](#)).
2. The Australian Government Minister responsible for the CSIRO, the Hon Ian Macfarlane MP, unequivocally confirmed the 24 kmh figure with the words "*...the fire spread 24 km in an hour*" (15/8/14 [Att. 4](#)).
3. The Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner Mr Craig Lapsley, then apparently in error stated "*...the fire speed increased to 9km/h - the fastest it would get...*" (10/9/14 [Att. 5](#)).
4. The former Victorian Government Minister, the Hon Kim Wells MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Bushfire Response repeated Mr Lapsley's apparent error "*...a maximum 9 km/h bushfire rate of spread*" (3/11/14 [Att. 6](#)).
5. Three of Australia's prominent bushfire experts were independently consulted "*...would you please advise me on the relevance of the difference between the Victorian Government's 9km and the Australian Government's 24 km maximum fire spread in an hour*" (12/12/14 [Att. 7](#)).
6. Mr Roger Underwood, one of Australia's most highly respected extreme bushfire analysts/commentators wrote, Victoria "*...appears to have adopted a warning system that underestimates the rate of passage of fire by more than 50%...such a serious inbuilt flaw has the potential to lead to an even worse disaster than that experienced on Black Saturday*" (20/12/14 [Att. 8](#)).
7. Mr David Packham, internationally recognised extreme bushfire scientist, wrote the fire "*...transformed from a wind driven fire to a convective fire when it impacted the extreme fuel levels...dramatically increasing the speed of the fire*" (9/1/15 [Att. 9](#)).
8. Mr Phil Cheney, Australia's most respected extreme bushfire scientist wrote, "*...under extreme fire weather...convective processes can generate wind speeds within the fire area that are much higher than the ambient wind speeds and may result in a dramatic and unpredicted escalation of fire behaviour*" (16/1/15 [Att. 10](#)).

It appears Victoria is in breach of Australia's constitutional arrangements on public warning about extreme bushfires. If this is indeed the case, why should the governments of New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory be asked to finance further extreme bushfire disaster grants for Victoria? As Prime Minister of Australia, I believe your instruction on this matter is clearly required.

Yours Sincerely,



Belinda Clarkson

CC: Australia:

State:

Australian Capital Territory
New South Wales
Northern Territory
South Australia
Tasmania
Queensland
Victoria
Western Australia

Leader:

Chief Minister Andrew Barr
Premier Mike Baird
Chief Minister Adam Giles
Premier Jay Weatherill
Premier Will Hodgman
Premier Campbell Newman
Premier Daniel Andrews
Premier Collin Barnett

Opposition Leader: Bill Shorten

Opposition Leaders:

Jeremy Hanson
Luke Foley
Delia Lawrie
Steven Marshall
Bryan Green
Annastacia Palaszczuk
Matthew Guy
Mark McGowan

Selected Australian media