



TIMBER TOWNS VICTORIA

A Local Government Association

Submission to the Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Bushfires in Victoria Timber Towns Victoria

15 April 2026

Timber Towns Victoria represents municipal councils across forestry-dependent regions, advocating on issues affecting both public and private land in Victoria.

The 2026 summer bushfire season has had significant impacts on regional communities, plantation assets, and local economies.

With increasing fire frequency, hotter conditions, and expanding interface communities, it is essential that fire management strategies evolve to prioritise early detection, rapid response, and coordinated planning.

Summary of Key Points

- Early detection is critical to reducing bushfire severity, protecting lives, and safeguarding plantation and native forest assets.
- Investment in AI-enabled fire camera networks must be expanded statewide, and nationally, particularly across high-risk regions and interface communities.
- Sustainable and predictable funding is required to ensure continuous monitoring, maintenance, and system improvements.
- Greater integration between fire detection systems and emergency services is essential to improve response times.
- Coordinated planning and fuel management across public and private land, including roadsides, must be supported.
- Lessons from the 2026 fire season highlight the need for faster response capability, improved access to remote areas, and stronger cross-sector collaboration.
- Protecting forests and communities from bushfire risk is critical to timber industries in Victoria that support 17,000 jobs statewide¹, our regional economies, local employment, supply chains, and vitally the 'wood fibre' needed for housing supply.

Impacts of the 2026 Fire Season

The recent fire season demonstrated:

- Increased pressure on emergency services and local government resources
- Damage to plantation forests² of which 22% of the national estate is in Victoria¹, disrupting timber supply chains and regional employment
- Increased risk to communities located near forest and plantation interfaces
- Challenges accessing fires in remote and rugged terrain

These impacts reinforce the importance of faster detection and initial suppression to prevent escalation into large-scale events.

Preparation and Planning

Effective preparation requires a coordinated approach across government, agencies, industry, and communities.

Land and Fuel Management

- Strengthened fuel reduction programs across public and private land
- Improved roadside vegetation management to reduce ignition risk and improve access
- Greater fuel management strategies across land tenures

Infrastructure and Access

- Investment in road and bridge maintenance to support firefighting access, particularly in plantation regions
- Planning for access into remote forest areas

Community and Industry Preparedness

- Clear communication and shared responsibility between councils, industry, and residents
- Support for industry-led fire response capabilities, including plantation fire crews

Early Detection and Technology

According to Forest Fire Management Victoria, early detection is critical and the biggest opportunity in reducing bushfire impact.³

AI-enabled fire camera networks provide proven capability to detect ignitions quickly, reducing response times and fire severity.⁴

Timber Towns Victoria recommends:

1. Statewide Expansion of AI Fire Camera Networks

Prioritise coverage across high-risk public forests, plantation estates, agricultural investments and regional communities.

2. Sustainable Operational Funding

Provide long-term funding for monitoring centres, system maintenance, and AI capability upgrades.

3. Integrated Fire Intelligence Systems

Ensure fire camera data is fully integrated with emergency services dispatch systems.

4. Improved Remote Firefighting Capability

Invest in road and bridge maintenance to support firefighting access, particularly in plantation and heavily forested regions to respond to fires in remote locations.

5. Strengthened Land and Roadside Management

Enhance fuel reduction and roadside management programs across all land tenures.

6. Cross-Sector Collaboration

Formalise partnerships between government, local councils, emergency services, and the timber industry.

7. Continuous Evaluation

Establish performance benchmarks for detection speed, response times, and system effectiveness.

Conclusion

The 2026 bushfire season has highlighted the increasing risk to Victoria's regional communities and forestry-dependent economies.

Early detection, supported by modern technology such as AI-enabled fire cameras, is essential to reducing bushfire impacts³. Combined with improved planning, stronger collaboration, and sustained investment, these measures will better protect lives, forests, and the plantation industry. A coordinated and forward-looking approach is required to ensure Victoria is better prepared for future fire seasons.

Thank you for considering Timber Towns Victoria's submission to the Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Bushfires in Victoria.



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References

1. Victorian Forest Products Association webpage facts
2. Victorian Forest Products Association 15 January 2026 Media Release - Bushfires Cause Significant Losses Across Victoria's Plantation Estate
3. Forest Fire Management Victoria 30 October 2025 news – Testing AI's potential for early bushfire detection
4. The Gippsland Monitor 27 February 2026 news – Bushfire detection just got a little bit easier with the help of AI cameras