



# MEDIA RELEASE

## Climate change ignites debate (05/12/2007)

In Australia, the threat of wild fire is increasing in intensity and frequency.

Climate change requires a change in community attitudes to the use of fire as an effective management tool to minimize the serious threat uncontrolled fires pose to human life, property, community assets and forest values.

As Australia's only professional association of foresters, the IFA believes that all forest managers have a social responsibility to reduce the threat of wild fires in order to protect natural values and social assets.

The community also has a responsibility to support forest managers when implementing programs which reduce this threat. These programs include maintaining biodiversity and ecological processes, as well as supporting silviculture and commercial forest management.

The IFA is deeply concerned that without a change in community attitudes to the use of fire in forest management, the level of damage to ecosystems, rural assets, homes and life that regularly occur in Australia will increase. Recent examples include mega-fires in Tasmania and Victoria during 2006/07.

The current lack of political and community support is occurring because influential environmentalists and academics place an emphasis on fire suppression, not prevention. Inner-city residents who are not directly threatened by bushfires, and not responsible for bushfire management, support the hands-off approach to land management until there is a threat to their health and well being. This usually takes the form of increased smoke which inhibits recreation and major events in large cities and concern about destruction of highly used recreational areas in urban fringes.

Meanwhile, rural communities, fire fighters, foresters and land managers recognize the value in promoting an interventionist approach, where steps are taken to minimise risks before fires start. We also need to support a well-equipped, highly trained and experienced rapid response fire fighting force.

The IFA encourages politicians and the community to debate fire management policies so that appropriate and responsible fire management is developed and implemented. The debate should be underpinned by good science. Support for mega-fire prevention strategies is an appropriate response to climate change to maintain forest health, biodiversity and reduce the threat to communities.

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