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Letter to Editor (Melbourne Age)

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) extends its sympathy to all who have suffered in the recent bushfires. Foresters have played a vital role in forest and fire management in Victoria for the last hundred years. Many Victorian IFA members are currently directly involved in the fire fighting effort and colleagues from interstate have joined them.

Fire management is an integral part of the training of foresters at tertiary and technical levels. Unfortunately, over the past 20 years the IFA has witnessed a decline in enrolments in tertiary forestry programs so that the next generation of forest and fire managers is not as great in numbers as it has been in the past. This has combined with different approaches to forest management, which preclude timber harvesting, reduce the role of professional foresters and result in a reduction in the experienced in-forest workforce and availability of equipment and manpower.

The IFA welcomes the establishment of a Royal Commission as such inquiries inevitably lead to better planning, procedures and preparedness. There is a tendency though, for the outcomes of such inquiries to be forgotten over time, such that we seem to need another major catastrophe to remind us what we already know. We urge those participating in the inquiry to learn from the past and look forward. IFA will use all its resources and knowledge of its members to contribute to a positive outcome for the protection of forests and the people who live and work in them.

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