

Wednesday 30 September 2009

## OMBUDSMAN SHOULD OVERSEE BUSHFIRE ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

The appointment of a Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Ombudsman would ensure the Brumby Government delivers on its commitment to implement all of the Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations.

The State Government is required to disclose by today its Implementation Plan for the Bushfires Royal Commission's Interim Recommendations, including a schedule for the implementation process. A plan that should be made publicly available to all Victorians.

Communities are very concerned that the recommendations will not be implemented in full given Labor ignored some 25 key recommendations and warnings made in previous years which were subsequently made again in the Royal Commission's Interim Report.

The Labor Government has an appalling record in this area. Between 2002 and 2008 it ignored crucial advice arising from a number of reports and reviews on issues such as emergency warning signals, the use of fire sirens, fire websites, Triple Zero, integrated fire management, fire refuges and clearer and/or better warnings.

The appointment of an independent Ombudsman to oversee the full implementation over the longer term of the interim and the final Royal Commission recommendations would help prevent the occurrence of another tragedy like Black Saturday.

The Royal Commission will monitor the initial implementation by requiring the government to provide a delivery report by 31 March 2010 but over the longer term it is vital that there is an independent mechanism to hold government to account.

Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission Jack Rush advocated a Bushfires Ombudsman in his submission to the Royal Commission.

*'... the establishment of a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of final recommendations, beyond the life of the Commission – for example, by appointing a Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Ombudsman.'* (Submission by Council Assisting the Bushfires Royal Commission)

# Policy

The adoption of this very sensible proposal would make sure government funding for bushfire preparedness such as emergency services, warning systems and prescribed burning would not be compromised and undermine the Royal Commission recommendations.

An ideal candidate for Ombudsman would be someone who is a community leader, who understands government processes and who has a proven track record of delivering outcomes.

Fire-affected communities in Victoria are extremely frustrated that many warnings and recommendations have been made before but have not been implemented.