

FOREST FIRE VICTORIA NEWS

ISSUE 5, DECEMBER 2005

MORE FUEL REDUCTION BURNING MUST BE DONE

More fuel reduction burning was essential, the President of Forest Fire Victoria, Athol Hodgson, said today. He was commenting on recent reports of below target spring burning on public lands as Victoria approaches what some have predicted will be a severe bushfire season.

Mr Hodgson said the effectiveness of fuel reduction burning in preventing bushfire losses was indisputable. There were numerous case studies reported in the Forests Commission Fire Research Reports that seemed to have been overlooked in setting present day work priorities on public land, he said.



Athol Hodgson

Mr Hodgson recounted personal experience in advocating a fuel reduction burn to protect Braemar College, at Mount Macedon. The work was carried out in 1982, but only after heated debate.

History records the impact of the high intensity bushfire of 1 February 1983¹. On this day, 24 houses were destroyed in the 5500ha burnt through, including 1864ha of state forest and pine plantation.

Braemar College was directly in the path of this high intensity fire as it swept up the flank of Mount Macedon, driven by gale force winds.



Fire near Braemar College in area not fuel reduced (1800 hrs)²

¹ Although 24 houses were destroyed in this outbreak, Macedon and Mount Macedon were not affected. Both towns were razed 2 weeks later on "Ash Wednesday".



Fire near Braemar College in fuel reduced area (1800hrs)¹

As can be seen from these graphic images, the fuel reduction burn fully protected the College from the devastation experienced elsewhere in the town. This is starkly shown in the aerial photograph below.



Aerial view Braemar College showing protective effect of fuel reduction²

Mr Hodgson said this was only one of many examples that showed the changes in policy the Government must make to ensure the responsible authority discharges its duty in relation to fire.

² **Source of images:** Research Report No 25 *The Effectiveness of Fuel Reduction Burning* Dept. Conservation Forests and Lands Victoria 1985.

This duty could be summarised as carrying out “proper and sufficient work” to manage fires to:

- **protect and sustain the health and biodiversity of forests;**
- **regenerate disturbed or degraded forests; and to**
- **prevent and suppress all unplanned fires on forests.**

Bushfire was unforgiving of mistakes and omissions, Mr Hodgson said, an adequately funded program of fuel reduction on all public land, carried out by trained and experienced personnel, was strongly justified.