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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Fire restrictions limit burn-offs**

Fire restrictions set to come into force from 1 November in the Colac-Otway and Corangamite shires will limit opportunities for landholders to carry out fuel reduction burns without the necessity to make application to obtain a permit, says David Koch, Member for Western Victoria.

Raising the issue in Parliament this week, David Koch said he was concerned about the inconsistencies applied to introducing fire restrictions across Western Victoria.

“The irregular declaration of fire restrictions is difficult to comprehend when you see southern higher rainfall areas where it is still green enforcing fire restrictions before and in some cases, well before, northern lower rainfall areas.

“Across Western Victoria fire restrictions historically have commenced in mid to late December, usually just before Christmas, but in recent years this has been brought forward to as early as 1 November for some areas, which limits the opportunity for farm managers and landholders, in particular, to undertake fuel reduction burns.

“Under the provisions of the Country Fire Authority Act, the CFA is responsible for declaring fire danger periods after consultation with relevant government agencies following an assessment of climatic conditions forecast for the coming summer.

“During the declared fire danger period, the use of fire for fuel reduction purposes is prohibited without a permit, and those not complying face severe penalties.

“However, the beginning and end dates of the fire danger period often differ between neighbouring municipalities and in some cases within municipalities.

“Fire restrictions are intended to be applied as the fire danger approaches, and only after due consideration is given to the impending risk.

“But fire restrictions coming into force from 1 November in the Colac-Otway and Corangamite shires, and not until later in the neighbouring Surf Coast and Golden Plains shires, or in Moyne, Ararat and Pyrenees where there is already a greater fire risk, means that landholders in the still green Colac-Otway and Corangamite shires are not able to carry out fuel reduction burn-offs of grass, scrub and other vegetation before the declared fire danger period commences, necessitating the need to obtain a permit before they can burn.

“Putting fire restrictions in place in Colac and Corangamite before more northerly neighbouring municipalities where grassland and forest floors dry out earlier, makes little sense and only imposes more red tape on responsible land managers.

“I have called on the Minister for police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron, to direct that there be consistency in the way the CFA fire restrictions are declared across Western Victoria after direct consultation with all parties on a region-by-region basis”, David Koch said.

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