



# A Fire Force



*“Fire in the landscape is a community problem and as a community member we play our role in protecting lives and assets.”*



*community  
protection*

## PROTECTING ASSETS

HVP Plantations is owned by superannuation and pension funds who invest in plantations on behalf of clients including private individuals, teachers, state employees, police and even fire fighters. They are keen to protect and grow their investments.

Assets have been protected to a large extent due to the combined efforts of the responsible fire authorities, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and HVP's own fire brigades.

As a manager of more than 245,000 hectares of land across rural Victoria, the company is committed to helping manage the fire risks facing all of our communities.

Weir says Forest Industry Brigades are a crucial asset for the community.

“Forest Industry Brigades enhance our capacity to fight forest fires through the experience they have and the specialised equipment they provide.”

Malcolm Tonkin, HVP Stewardship and Risk Programs Manager and a forester in Victoria for more than 30 years, says fire is a threat to the whole community, regardless of whose land it is on.



RECOGNITION FOR SERVICE

*“When we send them to a fire we know they are going to be effective.”*



FIRST ATTACK

That means working closely with the Fire Authorities, farmers and other rural land owners on joint fire prevention and suppression activities, fire training and safety management.

The company has seven Forest Industry Brigades (FIBs) which fit under the operational umbrella of the CFA. These brigades, located across the State, provide specialised equipment as well as fire fighters with many years of experience in dealing with forest fires.

Fire fighting is inherent in forestry culture and the depth of experience and local knowledge within HVP's workforce has been recognised by its fire fighting partners.

“If you look at the recent campaign fires, HVP played a significant role. They were integrated with CFA and DSE resources on the fire line and worked as one,” says CFA's manager of Forest Industry Brigades, Gary Weir.

“As a community member we play our role in protecting lives and assets,” he says. “You have to remember our staff are members of those communities.”

Some staff members are volunteers with their local CFA brigades as well as being part of HVP's fire crews.

HVP undertakes a range of prevention measures to protect its assets from fire including a network of firebreaks and fuel reduction burning.

Some employees have 20–30 years of experience fighting fires in native forests and plantations.

“We live with a certain amount of risk when it comes to fire,” says Tonkin. “Our people understand that. They are paid to work with fire as part of their job and they have considerable experience and skill in managing fire.”



*train  
to*



## FIRST ATTACK

Access to helicopters increases HVP's fire suppression capability around its plantation estate. A helicopter is a useful tool for water bombing and reconnaissance. Rapid detection using helicopters helps prevent fires from getting larger.

Under an agreement between HVP and the State Aircraft Unit (which manages aerial fire fighting resources), HVP has access to two helicopters.

"HVP pays for the standby of the aircraft and the first hour of fire bombing," says HVP operations manager in Gippsland Phil Whiteman.

"But once it is at a fire, it fits into the operational chain of command along with all other air resources."

Phil says the agreement represents "quite a departure" from the way air resources have been used in Victoria in the past.

"We aim to have the helicopter be the first appliance at the fire and keep the fire small. Our agreement with the State Aircraft Unit allows for immediate deployment. This represents a tangible benefit to ourselves, the community, CFA, and DSE."

HVP will dispatch the helicopter to anyone's land, if the fire is near HVP's estate.

"We have other measures in place, this is just extending the process one step further," said Martin Fuller, HVP's Risk and Safety Manager.

The agreement is believed to be the first for a forestry company and is based on a similar arrangement Melbourne Water has to protect its catchments.



TRAINING EXERCISE

STATE OF THE ART MAPPING

GPS TRACKING OF FIRE CREWS



## ARSON PREVENTION

40% of fires attended by HVP are deliberately lit. HVP therefore has good reason for its significant involvement in arson prevention strategies across Victoria.

HVP is a driving force in the Gippsland Arson Prevention Program (GAPP) which coordinates the efforts of local government, emergency services, and industry. This program supports and fits in with Crime Stoppers Victoria's state-wide arson reduction strategies.

# BLACK SATURDAY

Over 22,000ha of HVP's plantation and custodial land was burnt in the week of Black Saturday. These losses represented 10% of the HVP plantation estate. Prolonged drought, intense heat wave, and strong winds resulted in some of the worst bushfire conditions ever recorded in Victoria.



FIRE SALVAGE

CRIME STOPPERS

BUSHFIRE RURAL COMMISSION

Whilst plantation losses were significant, 90% of the company's estate remained undamaged. Within days of the fire, harvesting crews had been rescheduled into salvaging fire affected areas to ensure continued supply to customers.

"Black Saturday had a significant impact

on our people who live and work in the communities affected by fire," comments Linda Sewell, HVP CEO. Over 200 HVP staff and contractors were involved in fire fighting on Black Saturday.

The company's response and efforts to control wildfires were commended by the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission.

# TRAINING TOGETHER

Fire and safety training and accreditation is a key part of HVP's preparation for fire season with every employee required to attend training days and refresher courses and undergo regular medical and functional assessments leading into summer.

Training days regularly attract fire fighters from other organisations. Working in teams, they complete a range of activities and test equipment,

"Efficient communications, everyone knowing their function, being trained and accredited, and having a rapport with other agencies are absolutely critical in controlling fires and maintaining a safe work environment." says Martin Fuller, HVP's Risk and Safety Manager.

According to HVP forest technician David Horsburgh, "The company wants its people to be the best which is reflected in the training we get. I would have to say the skill level among HVP people is very high, which is reassuring when you are out on the fire line."



inter-agency  
co-operation

# FOREST INDUSTRY BRIGADES

## What is a Forest Industry Brigade?

A Forest Industry Brigade (FIB) is a fire brigade run by a forest plantation company. The industry-based brigades are set up by plantation companies, but are structured as normal CFA brigades, come under the operational control of the CFA and members must meet the same accreditation requirements. HVP has 7 Forest Industry Brigades.

## Why do we have FIBs?

In November, 1997, the Victorian Government introduced legislation requiring forest plantation companies to form fire brigades to provide for their own asset protection.

## What is so special about plantations?

Plantations have different fuel structures and fire behaviour characteristics compared with traditional rural environments featuring farmland, grass and scrub. Visibility and access into plantations is less obvious than in grasslands and fire behaviour considerations are more complex.

HVP employees regularly deal with fire as part of their job. Fire prevention and suppression is a critical part of the company's culture.

HVP brigades work alongside local CFA crews and crews from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

## How do Forest Industry Brigades fit in with the CFA?

Having Forest Industry Brigades set up under the umbrella of the CFA allows the fire authority to access equipment and fire fighters who are specialists in this area and can provide leadership and guidance in plantation fire suppression.

Industry brigades are only required to protect plantation assets but HVP's brigades regularly operate outside their

plantation estate alongside CFA and DSE crews.

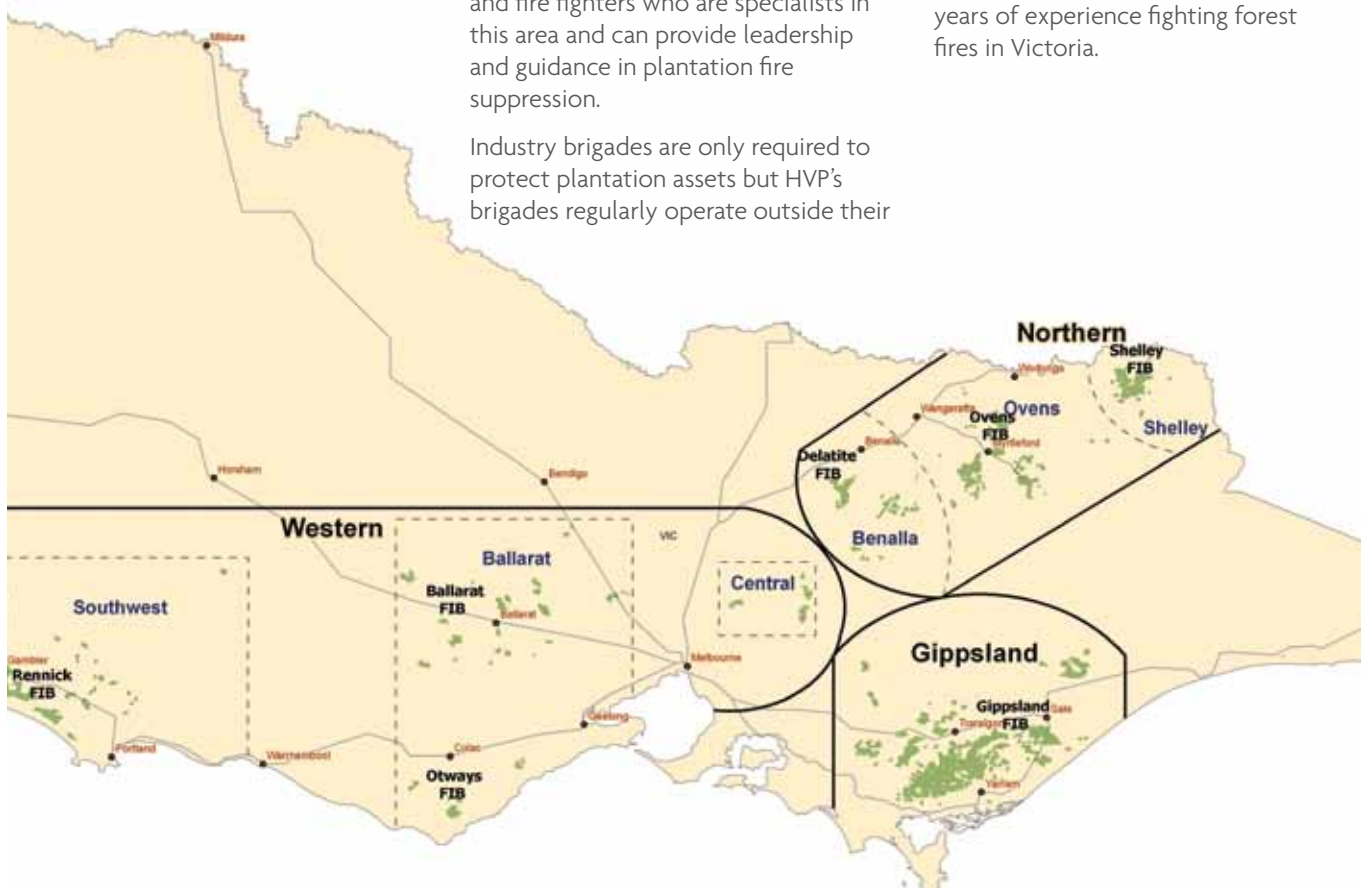
## What does HVP contribute?

HVP is the biggest Forest Industry Brigade operator in Victoria. It has seven company brigades across the state providing 24 hours a day service, seven days a week.

HVP maintain a network of firebreaks and dams across its estate. The company owns a fleet of forest fire fighting vehicles. It operates dozers, helicopters, spotter aircraft and also owns look-out towers. These towers are a critical part of the integrated approach to fire spotting by CFA, DSE, and the forest industry.

The majority of HVP's permanent workforce live in regional and rural communities and are trained to attend a fire. Metropolitan based staff provide back-up support in administration, logistics and areas like mapping.

Some HVP staff have more than 30 years of experience fighting forest fires in Victoria.



## PART OF THE TEAM

HVP is often called upon to fight fires on farm land and in native forests. It does so willingly. “Fire is a community threat, it doesn’t matter whose land it is on,” says Malcolm Tonkin, HVP Stewardship and Risk Programs Manager.

“We prepare, train and work together with the community, CFA and DSE during fire season. None of it involves a ‘one-man band’, you do have to work together.”

Most fires HVP attends start outside the plantation boundary. It makes good business sense for HVP to work closely with neighbouring land owners on fire breaks and fuel reduction activities around common boundaries.

HVP has developed fire protection guidelines for its operations which are in excess of those required under current CFA regulations. The guidelines have been developed over many years and aim to reduce the incidence and severity of fires that do start on company land.



FIRE TOWERS



FIRE COMMAND ROOM



EXPERIENCE

## AT A GLANCE

Number of FIBs: **7**

Number of fire tankers: **20**

Number of slip-on units: **38**

Number of trained fire fighters: **250**

Fires attended per year: **50**

Fires attended outside HVP: **60%**

Area of HVP estate: **245,000 ha**

## ALL HANDS ON DECK

When a major fire breaks out, HVP staff mobilise like a well-oiled military machine.

“If you work in forestry, you know fire fighting is integral to the summer and you understand if there is a fire, you down tools and you go, even if you are on holiday,” says Malcolm Tonkin, HVP Stewardship and Risk Programs Manager.

At the outbreak of a fire, the company works quickly to determine where its brigades are needed. Those on standby are called in and changeover crews are marshalled, ready to be sent from one end of the State to the other within hours.

HVP also has access to international resources from other Hancock forestry operations based interstate and overseas and has used their NZ crews on a number of occasions.

HVP relies heavily on local businesses during a fire campaign. The company tends to have strong relationships with local accommodation, food and fuel suppliers, and mechanics who are valued for their ability to get things done 24 hours a day.

“When there is a fire, people put their regular jobs aside. Everyone plays a role, even if they are not on the fire line. We turn their skills to the fire campaign,”

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