

April 2026

Stop the Planned Burns in Snowy River National Park

Scientists, researchers, and community members call on the Victorian Government to pause, review, and reconsider.

59,000 ha of recovering National Park proposed for burning across two burns (GP-SNO-ORB-0211 and GP-SNO-BOC-0092).

110+ threatened wildlife species in the burn area, including Greater Gliders and Sooty Owls.

Far away from any major town or major population centre.

2019–20, 2014, 2009, 2003: the last four times this area was catastrophically burned.

We write to ask you to immediately pause two planned burns in the Snowy River National Park and commission an independent review before any burning proceeds. Together, these burns cover nearly 59,000 hectares of country that is still recovering from one of the worst fire seasons in Australian history. We believe the scientific evidence does not justify these burns — and that proceeding without proper scrutiny would cause serious, irreparable damage to one of Victoria's most ecologically important landscapes.

These burns don't protect towns

The government says these burns are needed for 'bushfire protection.' But the science is clear: at best, fuel reduction only makes a meaningful difference when it is **close to homes and towns**. Research by Gibbons and colleagues on the 2009 Black Saturday fires found that beyond 10 kilometres from houses, prescribed burning has no statistically significant protective effect — and that even the most intensive close-to-house treatment reduced losses by only 38%.^[1] A 2025 study by the same team, examining 1,617 houses across southern Australia, found **no meaningful protection from prescribed burning beyond three kilometres from houses** or beyond five years since a previous burn.^[2]

There are no major communities close to the area that this burn could credibly protect.

And under the worst conditions, they won't stop fires either

There is a second problem. Scientific analysis of Victoria's 2003 Alpine Fire and the 2019–20 Black Summer found that when fire danger is high enough — the kind of conditions that drive the fires we remember — prior fuel reduction makes almost no difference to how a fire behaves.^[3] The fire is driven by wind and heat, not by how much fuel is on the ground.^[4]

Burning this landscape again may actually make it more dangerous

After a fire, forests go through a dense regrowth phase — thick shrubs and saplings that are actually **more flammable** than old-growth forest.^[5] The longer a forest is left to recover, the more it naturally opens up, becomes less dense, and resists the spread of fire.^[6] Analysis of the mapped fire records for the Snowy River showed that burning can reduce risk for two to three

years in dry forests and woodlands along the Snowy River, but then drives a 2.5 to 3 fold increase in risk for one and a half to two decades afterwards.^[6]

Snowy River National Park has already been through catastrophic fires in 2003, 2009, 2014, and 2019–20. The parts of the park that haven't recently burned are the most ecologically valuable — and the most fire-resilient. Burning them again pushes them back to square one.

The ecological damage would be severe and long-lasting

This landscape is home to more than 110 threatened species. Many depend on large old trees with hollows — habitat that takes **120 to 240 years to form**. Planned burns kill these trees through fire entering hollows, repeated scorching of the base, and deliberate felling along firebreak lines. Long-term monitoring shows Victoria has already lost nearly half its hollow-bearing trees since 1997.^[7] Research by Taylor and Lindenmayer (2020) found a 77% reduction in old growth forest across Victoria since 1995 — in Mountain Ash forests, only around 1% of the original extent now qualifies as old growth.^[8]

Some of the forests here — Alpine Ash and Mountain Ash — cannot resprout after fire. They must regrow from canopy-stored seed, and they need about 20 years to accumulate enough seed. A second fire before that point wipes out the next generation entirely, permanently replacing forest with scrub.^[6] This has already happened across large areas of Victoria. These burns risk making it permanent across Mountain Ash stands in this landscape — a species that reaches its eastern range limit in East Gippsland and is restricted to only a few localities in the region.

The frequency of fire, as well as intensity, size, season and other variables, is very influential in determining ecological outcomes. Research published in *Nature* (Driscoll et al., 2024), drawing on post-fire monitoring of more than 2,200 species across six ecosystem types following the 2019–20 megafires, found that where fires had occurred three or more times in the preceding 40 years (see map 1), the negative effects on wildlife populations were 87–93% larger than in areas burnt once or not at all.^[9] Where the previous fire was within 10 years, negative effects were 70% larger — and this held even for low-severity fires (map 2). Much of the Snowy River burn footprint falls into exactly these categories. This means the ecological damage from a planned burn here would not simply add to the cumulative toll — it would amplify it.

These burns have already escaped elsewhere

Victoria's own fire management agency reported that three planned burns breached their control lines in a single four-week period in 2024 — one was declared a bushfire.^[10] A recent 210-hectare planned burn near Dargo escaped and became a 5,500-hectare fire within days. The proposed program here covers nearly 59,000 hectares of remote, fire-sensitive forests. The risk of an escape is real, and it scales with size.

We ask that you:

- **Immediately** pause both burns pending an independent ecological review.
- **Commission an independent review** of the combined 59,000-hectare program — conducted by researchers with no conflict of interest.
- **Refer both burns for federal assessment** under the EPBC Act, given the likely impact on more than 21 nationally listed threatened species.
- **Release the full burn plans publicly** — including ecological safeguards — before any ignition.

We support a fire management approach focused on protecting homes and communities with targeted actions close to assets, investing in faster fire detection and response, and genuine partnerships with Traditional Owners on cultural burning. We do not support broad scale burning such as these that are targeting nearly 59,000 hectares of recovering national park, far from any community, in a landscape that has already been through catastrophic fire four times this century – with no credible scientific justification and no published assessment of the combined ecological impact.

Snowy River National Park belongs to all Victorians. It deserves better than this.

SIGNATORIES

This letter is signed by scientists in their personal capacities. Institutional affiliations are for identification only.

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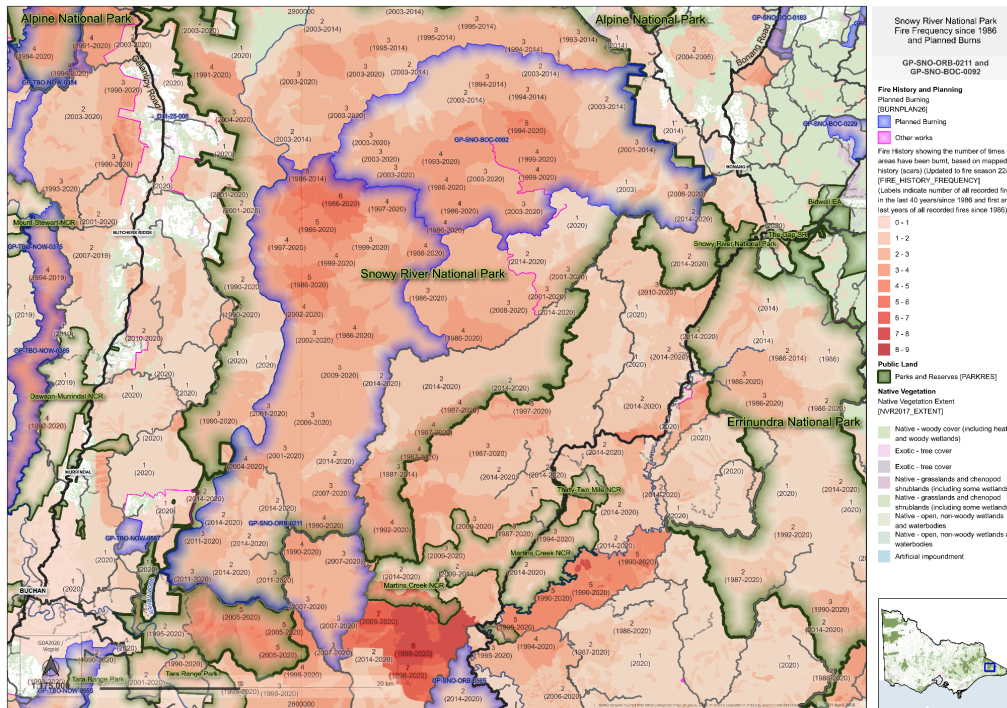
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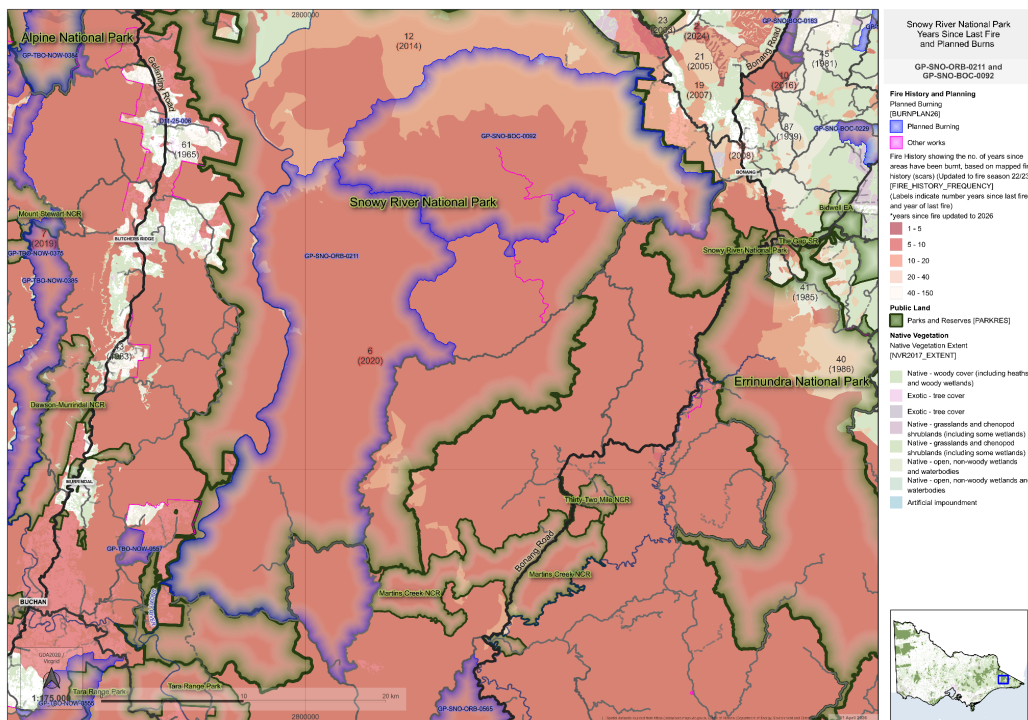
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Map 1. Fire Frequency in proposed planned burns area



Map 2. Years since last fire in proposed planned burns area



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