

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **VICTORIA'S NEW ENVIRONMENT MINISTER INHERITS A BURNING NATIONAL PARK ON DAY ONE**

*FFMVic lit a 35,000-hectare Snowy River National Park burn hours after ministerial reshuffle. Scientists, conservationists, and community groups had warned the previous minister for months*

The Hon. Enver Erdogan MP was today appointed Victoria's new Minister for Environment. Within hours of his appointment, Forest Fire Management Victoria lit an almost 35,000-hectare planned burn in Snowy River National Park - a burn that leading scientists had urged the previous minister to stop, and that is now Erdogan's to own.

The burn, GP-SNO-ORB-0211, began at approximately 12:53pm on 15 April 2026. It is the first stage of a two-burn program that would see nearly 59,000 hectares of recovering national park burned - country that has already been through catastrophic fires in 2003, 2009, 2014, and 2019-20.

The Goongerah Environment Centre is calling on Minister Erdogan to intervene immediately. The burn is underway. A second burn - a further 24,003 hectares - is proposed for 2028. There is still time to stop this program from doing irreversible damage.

An open letter coordinated by GECO and signed by some of Australia's most respected fire ecologists and biodiversity researchers warned that the scientific evidence does not justify these burns and that proceeding without proper assessment risks irreversible ecological damage to one of Victoria's most significant national parks. The previous minister never responded. The burn was lit regardless.

Signatories include Professor David Lindenmayer AC, Distinguished Professor at the Australian National University and one of Australia's most cited ecologists; Professor Don Driscoll of Deakin University; Dr Philip Zylstra of Curtin University; Professor Hugh Possingham of the University of Queensland; Dr Sarah Bekessy of the University of Melbourne; and David Cameron, Honorary Fellow of the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research - the Victorian Government's own former peak ecology research body.

*"The scientific evidence does not justify these burns - and proceeding without proper scrutiny would cause serious, irreparable damage to one of Victoria's most ecologically important landscapes."*

*- Open letter to the Victorian Environment Minister, signed by leading scientists, April 2026*

## **A landscape already pushed to the edge**

The open letter draws on peer-reviewed research to make its case. Research published in *Nature* (Driscoll et al., 2024), tracking more than 2,200 species following the 2019-20 megafires, found that where fires had occurred three or more times in the preceding 40 years, the negative effects on wildlife were 87 to 93 per cent larger than in areas burned once or not at all. Spatial mapping of the burn footprint shows large portions of the proposed area have already crossed that threshold.

The burn footprint is home to more than 110 threatened species, including Greater Gliders and Sooty Owls. It contains some of the last Mountain Ash stands in East Gippsland - a species that cannot resprout after fire and requires around 20 years to accumulate enough seed to regenerate. A further fire before that point eliminates the next generation permanently.

Research on the 2009 Black Saturday fires found that prescribed burning has no statistically significant effect on house survival beyond ten kilometres. A 2025 study found no meaningful protection beyond three kilometres. There are no major communities close enough to this burn to benefit.

### **Warnings the previous minister ignored**

Minister Erdogan's predecessor, Steve Dimopoulos, was given every opportunity to pause and review these burns before they were lit:

- In March 2026, Environment East Gippsland wrote formally to Minister Dimopoulos calling for both burns to be paused and independently reviewed. No substantive response was received.
- In March 2026, Environment East Gippsland lodged a formal call-in request with federal Environment Minister Murray Watt under the EPBC Act, given the presence of more than 21 nationally listed threatened species in the burn footprints. No endorsed strategic assessment under the EPBC Act exists for this program.
- GECO lodged a formal FOI request with DEECA and FFMVic seeking the burn delivery plans and species assessments for both burns. Those documents were never released.
- Today, GECO sent a letter to Minister Dimopoulos and FFMVic Chief Fire Officer Chris Hardman attaching the open letter and calling for an immediate halt. The burn was lit regardless.

"Minister Erdogan has walked into this portfolio with a burning national park and a stack of unanswered warnings on his desk," said Isaac Carné, Campaigner at the Goongerah Environment Centre. "This was not his decision - but it is now his responsibility. He has an opportunity today that his predecessor never took: to listen to the scientists, halt the program, and commission the independent review this landscape deserves. We are calling on him to take it."

### **What Minister Erdogan must do now**

GECO is calling on the new minister to act immediately:

1. Direct FFMVic to cease burning and stand down operations on GP-SNO-ORB-0211
2. Commission an urgent independent ecological review of the combined 59,000-hectare program
3. Release publicly the burn delivery plans and species assessments for both burns
4. Refer the combined program for federal assessment under the EPBC Act before the second burn proceeds
5. Meet with GECO, Environment East Gippsland, and the scientific signatories to the open letter

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**ENDS**

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**Notes to editors**

- The full open letter, including all signatories and scientific references, is available at [geco.org.au](https://geco.org.au) [LINK HERE](#)
- Spatial fire history maps of the burn footprint are available on request
- FFMVic burn notification confirmed ignition at 12:53pm, 15 April 2026
- Minister Erdogan's office: (03) 9651 8260 | [enver.erdogan@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:enver.erdogan@parliament.vic.gov.au)