



Protests against a planned burn at Trident Arm in Lake Tyers State Park took place in Bairnsdale last week before Aboriginal and non-Indigenous protestors moved into the Colquhoun State Forest. (PS)

Fury over burn offs

A protest by about 50-60 people outside the Bairnsdale offices of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and later at Casey Creek in the Colquhoun State Forest has halted a planned burn at Trident Arm in Lake Tyers State Park.

Casey Creek was lit last week and the Trident Arm burn was scheduled to take place within the next 10 days.

The protest, which got underway at about 8am last Wednesday, at DELWP, was spearheaded by Victorian Greens Senator and former Lakes Entrance resident, Lidia Thorpe, who is a proud Gunaai and Gunditjmarra woman.

Senator Thorpe, who said she was

protesting burns being undertaken by DELWP without consultation with the Traditional Owners, was joined by members of several local environment groups.

DELWP started a 750-hectare burn at Casey Creek in the Lake Tyers catchment on Wednesday.

Senator Thorpe said "the environment in that part of the country is unlike anywhere else in the world".

"It's my country, my mother lives out at Lake Tyers, we have a continued connection to that part of country and the landscape has been manicured over hundreds and hundreds of years," Senator Thorpe said.

"What is able to grow in this particular

area is quite special," she said referring to the diverse vegetation that co-exists in the landscape.

Senator Thorpe described the burn as "illegal" because "the government and the department had not obtained consent from Traditional Owners".

"The Department has no regard for Traditional Owners. It's time for them to come back to the table and negotiate genuinely with us because there are certain parts of country that simply cannot be burned," she said.

"So we're talking about hundreds and hundreds of hectares being burnt in an area that went through extreme bushfires and we're talking about a water catchment that needs to be protected."

Senator Thorpe said it was extremely disappointing that Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) "weren't even aware of these burns".

"It's meant to be a joint management arrangement (between Parks Victoria and GLaWAC), so that just demonstrates how joint information sharing is not part of that process," she said.

GLaWAC chief executive officer, Roger Fenwick, supported Senator Thorpe's statement that the Corporation had been unaware of the planned burn which was carried out by Forest Fire Management Victoria – an arm of DELWP.

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Former Lakes Entrance resident, and now Greens Senator, Lidia Thorpe, addresses the crowd during the Bairnsdale protest. INSET: Bung Yarnda at Trident Arm, which is on the list of planned burns by Forest Fire Management Victoria. (PS)

Fears for habitat

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Mr Fenwick said GLaWAC was aware of a three-year rolling burn program, "but had not been actively involved in the detail".

He said more detail and discussion was required around particular burns.

Mr Fenwick reiterated GLaWAC had not given formal in-principle support to last week's burn at Casey Creek and when the Corporation became aware the bushland was being burnt "we definitely elevated our concerns".

Traditional Owners said they had only found out about the planned burn two days before the bush was lit up.

Mr Fenwick said the relationship with the relevant stakeholders was "still evolving" and there were "community conversations that need to be had" in relation to planned burns.

Louise Crisp, from Gippsland Environment Group, told the *Post* that DELWP was planning to burn 70,000 hectares of bushland in East Gippsland over the next three years which she said would result in "a critical loss of

habitat".

Ms Crisp said the glossy black cockatoo, which is prevalent in Lake Tyers catchment and Colquhoun State Forest, had not been factored in the habitat that was set alight last week.

She said it appeared Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) hadn't factored in records lodged in the past 12 months that are on DELWP's biodiversity database.

"It would appear they've just gone ahead in an abysmal failure of process," Ms Crisp said.

However, she said after it was brought to FFMVic's attention, authorities have now protected a small area of black shea oaks, which is the sole food source of glossy black cockatoos.

FFMVic met with GLaWAC on Friday and later issued a joint statement saying a decision had been made to "reschedule the Trident Arm planned burn" following a meeting of senior leaders.

The statement said "both parties remain committed to the joint delivery of this planned burn in the months ahead".

"Additional time will be taken to review the ecological values and intangible culture values evident on the site," the statement said.

FFMVic says it's committed "to hearing the voices of Traditional Owners through GLaWAC to ensure they provide significant input into how Country is managed".

The statement said the Trident Arm planned burn "has a list of identified cultural and biodiversity values" which FFMVic said it was aware of.

Senator Thorpe said she was pleased that the parties had now consulted but said the fire plan needed to put on the table so everyone could peruse them.

As a Gunaai woman, Senator Thorpe told ABC radio she was insulted that "two white men" were talking about burning her Country and said there was a need for Traditional Owners to have more input.

She said the planned burn wouldn't go ahead because people are presently camped in the area to prevent it happening.