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Media release

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Bushfire risk - PM refuses to face facts

The Prime Minister's unwillingness to accept the fact that there is a proven link between climate change and increased bushfire risk flies tragically in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence, according to Australia Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

The Prime Minister yesterday dismissed as 'esoteric' a report linking the expected increases in the frequency and intensity of bushfires to the adverse effects of climate change.

Dr Hamilton said this cavalier attitude reflects an alarming lack of leadership on the most serious threat to the nation's future.

"The Prime Minister's dogged refusal to accept the advice of scientists is consistent with his well-known scepticism about global warming", said Dr Hamilton.

"But his rejection of the science leaves Australians helpless in the face of the climate crisis. How many scientists have to repeat the warnings before the Prime Minister grasps the seriousness of the situation?"

The link between global warming and increased bushfire risk has been established in a series of reports and papers by the CSIRO, the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, COAG's national inquiry into bushfire mitigation and the recent Commonwealth State of the Environment Report.

CSIRO projections indicate that climate change will increase the frequency of very high and extreme fire danger days by 4-25 per cent by 2020 and 15-70 per cent by 2050 across south-east Australia.

"What we are witnessing in Victoria and Tasmania very early this summer is likely to become more frequent as climate change produces weather conditions that increase the risk of fire," said Dr Hamilton.

"The enormous damage caused by bushfires reinforces the message of the Stern Report, which argued that the costs of doing nothing to address global warming are going to be much greater than the costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions now."

The report may be read under "Latest Web Papers" on the Australia Institute's website - www.tai.org.au.