

SUBMISSION

NO. 024c

17 SEP 2007

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Executive Officer
Environmental and Natural Resource Committee
Parliament house
East Melbourne Vic 3002



Amended Terms of Reference

Inquiry into the impact of public land management Practices on bushfires in Victoria

THE CONSEQUENT IMPACT OF THE FOLLOWING VERY HEAVY RAINS CREATEING THE JUNE/JULY 2007 GIPPSLAND FLOOD

Preface:

Further to our submission to the inquiry into the impact of public Land management Practices on Bush fires in Victoria--- I would like to explain in a descriptive and simple form of what happens when public land is left unmanaged and neglected over many years.

I write this submission with serious concern at the apparent lack of understanding in the departments, to which we are forced to conform , and with the inadequate bush management in the present policy .

This was the policy that destroyed Wulgulmerang and Benambra in 2003 and Licola in 2007.

First came the ferocious fires that destroyed everything- both public and private property—then shortly after the fires came torrential rains.
Lives were threatened and trauma still exists in the people.
Government took no responsibility for their fault in this disaster.

We should all learn from our mistakes –so why maintain a faulty policy?

Gippsland consists of millions of hectares of neglected public land- and is a mountainous region. This area with its gorges and streams carry the rain waters to the lakes and the sea. It fills the dams that service towns, and cities – it gives environmental flows to streams.

✓

In the past , - off summer burns took place in Autumn , Winter and Spring- this was managed by forestry officers.

These officers and their crews were based throughout Gippsland – their children attended the schools and helped keep the small outback towns alive

Farmers were involved and common sense prevailed. These crews understood the areas and its needs ,

The present day DSE do not seem to understand what has to be done----- or they take their orders from urban directors who do not have a clue !

At this time of the year it is possible to have quiet, slow burning fires-cleaning up fires –the fires trickle along the ground consuming ground litter that otherwise builds up into a serious fuel load that can quickly become an inferno with lightning strikes- driven by fierce summer winds. Every thing is destroyed in its path-the bush loses its animals , wild flowers, filtration grasses,

In the past there were far less restrictive regulations- the bush had plenty of grass- native animals survived in the bush. The Australian bush has a need for quiet fires – at the proper time -- for its survival--

With quiet fires the eucalypt trees do not sucker out .

Fierce fires create a eucalyptus monoculture-the gums sucker into many trunks depleting the bush of its native grasses ... Where fire has been intense , there is not much native grass left to carry surviving native grass eaters –they then invade farmland .

From many years of experience - living in the mountains- we know that in summer there are heavy thunderstorms accompanied by severe lightning. Often fires are started – sometimes they just burn a small patch-but with a huge build up of forest litter , they are now difficult to stop. Parks policy is to lock up their areas and then the area is inaccessible for any fire control.

In managed bush they usually peter out – in unmanaged bush , they create the worst possible damage--- as witnessed in the 2003 in Wulgulmerang/Benambrambra and in 2007 mountain fires at Licola.

When fires are heavily fuelled , they burn deep into the ground so that in Summer rain storms – there is no topsoil or vegetation left to steady the heavy thunder storm water flow, often inches of rain fall very quickly- there is nothing to slow the rush of water- so there is water rolling instantly from the downpour and carrying ash, logs, soil in a swift movement. Flash flooding is very damageing

We saw the logs carried miles down creeks out of the mountains in muddy water - fences and bridges were washed away-these had just been rebuilt after the fires- damage to farms was costly, damage to the environment was incalculable.

Blackberries and weeds were carried down from the mountains in the floods and every clean farmland gully was full of blackberry seedlings in a few weeks---they carried out of the public land and spread over private land .

Five years on from the 2003 fire,the Buchan river still runs like chocolate when there is rain in the headwaters-

*******HOW LONG WILL THE FILTRATION SYSTEM OF THE MOUNTAINS TAKE TO REGENERATE?*******

This same scenario was allowed – by government -to happen in the 2007 fires—a complete replica at Licola—with huge damage to the bush ,to the catchment areas, to the residents , to the environment, to the water supplies.

These are the areas that were so badly maintained that all the filtration system of mosses, lichen grasses and understory , were destroyed—the build up of fuel burned deeply into the earth leaving a bed of ash – it was loose and powdery- so when heavy rain followed the fire – there was nothing to slow it down.

******* In Gippsland the mountains and foothills are relied upon to deliver clean water supplies for the towns and cities*******

GIPPSLAND FIRE PLANS-----2007

(Please inspect current fire plans – they are relative to the next fire and the next destructive flood.)

(The fire plan for Nowa Nowa 2008----the part marked History- has no plans - is building up a dangerous fuel load)Has no one in the Department had a look at the situation in the area?

These fire plans are the areas developed in the 2007 fire plan that are marked on our fire management maps in Nowa Nowa region--- With no management over the past 5 years –these areas are not marked for any management in the next 3 years and are called history on the fire map---- I am assured by many local farmers that the areas marked “history”, are in need of active fire management now –with dense under growth that needs attention - practical management- burns before the coming summer .There is a small area designated for management in 2008, another small area for 2009 and another small area for 2010--- and the talk of climate change is for drier, hotter conditions !

**-DO YOU WONDER THAT THE LOCALS ARE LACKING IN
CONFIDENCE IN THE DSE????**

Management of these areas are needed, by burns at safe times, on a regular basis, burns that keep the ground clean of litter and fuel, but do not destroy everything----- so that the filtration system remains.

The impact of the bushfire in the mountains and its causes, followed by the floods in 2003- should have been obvious to the DSE scientists—We think local knowledge and experience had better be listened to before next fire season.

*******Much more fuel management must be carried out- EACH YEAR.
An improved regional approach has to be achieved.*******

*******If there's not enough money, then better funding – adequate funding must be granted by government.**

This has to be a priority—Government has to recognise its responsibility--- we consider that there needs to be more practical, hands on management within the DSE *****

There is need for a new public land management policy to be developed in consultation with practical, local people – these are the neighbours who have to live with the present threat to their livelihoods threats of fires, threats of floods that destroy the catchment areas.

This coming autumn fire plan, is totally inadequate.

From our perspective we believe the coming summer is terrifying - the bush surrounding Buchan district has not been properly fire managed for many years

We cannot protect our assets when we are surrounded by these dense unmanaged public land and parks- so far this winter we have lost many trees/ big branches in cyclonic winds especially along roadsides---these winds are even more powerful in summer when there is fire driving them. The scenario is not encouraging

*****Some of DSE practices called fire management -- seem to rely on suppression rather than prevention of fire.*****

This system of management has an adverse impact on our rivers– and the environment

We note, the ridiculous closure and lack of maintenance of tracks, the historical loss of resources from land management agencies, like the old forest industry, and lack of prior fuel reduction burning.

There are a lot of good fire reduction burning days in winter and spring this year- nothing happened-

It has to happen at those times as well----to get some management over destructive summer bush fire.

Much more fuel reduction is possible --this coming summer is a very great worry – so very little fuel reduction was achieved last Autumn

It is better to manage the head waters of the rivers by fire at the best times, than try and restore a filtration system that might take many years to re grow- if ever.

**FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY MUST
BE CHANGED AND IMPROVED**

Heather Livingstone

Copies sent to:

**Hon. John Pandazopoulos
Mr Craig Ingram
Mr Peter Hall
Mr Peter Ryan**