

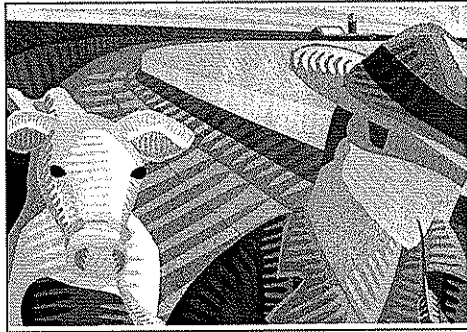
SUBMISSION

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21 MAY 2007

NO. 066

ENVIRONMENTAL AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE



**MITCHELL RIVER CATCHMENT AGRICULTURAL
BUSINESS ASSOCIATION**

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21 May 2007

Environmental & Natural Resource Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

The Committee,

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of Public Land Management Practices on Bushfires in Victoria.

The Mitchell River Catchment Agricultural Business Association represents businesses dependent on the Mitchell River. The committee wishes to make a submission regarding your term of reference #7 "the provision and maintenance of large water points on crown land to assist with bushfire aerial task force operations"

This term of reference makes it clear that it is understood that aerial appliances, particularly large helicopters, can be extremely effective in first attack on lightning strikes, spot fires and spot-overs breaching control lines, thus providing the necessary time needed for ground crews to complete blacking these spots out, **provided refill times are short**. One CFA member of our committee had the privilege of observing helicopters operating on the Boulder Creek fire on 6th January 2007. On the same day when the eastern edge of the Great Divide Complex South Fire broke control lines and threatened Bruthen, numerous spot overs on the Boulder Creek fire were rapidly suppressed using helicopters refilling from dams on cleared private property adjacent to the fire. Very rapid turn-around times for the helicopters meant that the Boulder Creek fire was contained to 2040 ha, whereas it could easily have burnt huge tracts of country east of Cabbage Tree Creek.

Current State Government policy is that no dam be built on the Mitchell River. This is assumed to be because of its status as a Heritage River, although the Thompson River between the Thompson Reservoir and the Cowwarr Weir is also designated as a Heritage River, despite the presence of the large reservoir upstream. Hence it could be argued that dams *per se* do not detract from Heritage River status.

One option which could be considered to provide water for aerial attack would be the provision of a dam or dams or weir or weirs on a tributary or tributaries of the Mitchell. Such structures would certainly fulfill the aim of creating bodies of water suitable for use

by helicopters in areas where terrain and forest cover make it difficult to create suitable sites.

These are likely to prove to be expensive, but in addition to the benefits for firefighting would provide a mechanism whereby flows for environmental, commercial, and domestic purposes could be maintained in the Mitchell during summer.

Objections which may be raised to such a proposal may include thermal pollution, whereby cold water from the depths of the reservoir is released during summer, and barriers to fish migration, although this is likely to be less significant on the higher tributaries. In any case, both can be easily overcome, the former by releasing surface water only, the second by the provision of fish ladders.

We hope that your Committee will give this proposal serious consideration.

Yours faithfully,

D. McKerrell

David McKerrell
Honorary Secretary
Mitchell River Catchment Agricultural Business Association