

SUBMISSION

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ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE

18 May 2007

Executive Officer
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Spring St.
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Sir,

**Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of Public Land
Management Practices on Bushfires in Victoria**

This submission is made by June and John Anwin property owners and residents of Healesville in the Yarra Valley.

Our concerns relate to the Melbourne Water policy of revegetating the banks of waterways with indigenous vegetation, in close proximity to public and private assets and the Yarra Ranges Shire extending this policy to cover Queens Park in Healesville.

Queens Park is a public open space of approx. 18 hectares bounded to the north by Maroondah Hwy. and the Grace Burn creek, extending south approx. 750 metres, bounded to the west and east by Badger Creek Rd. and Don Rd. The area contains a formal children's playground, tennis courts, child care centre, open air swimming pool, football and soccer field, BMX track, skateboard facility and the Shire owned Living and Learning centre containing meeting and community teaching facilities and the Oonah indigenous Swinburne campus.

Thru the park, from Don Rd. in the south east corner and northward generally up the centre and then toward the western side exiting under Maroondah Hwy., is an unnamed minor waterway. This waterway is under the control of Melbourne Water who fund a local environment group to revegetate the banks, along with the banks of other waterways, with indigenous plants under their "healthy waterways" programme.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges is extending this planting regime within the park, to the extent that large tracts of ground, where a few eucalypt and other native trees are growing in isolation, are having fallen branches left on the ground with the grass being sprayed and killed off to facilitate more indigenous vegetation being planted around these trees. These areas are now becoming very significant in size extending right up to the paved footways and coupled with the plantings along the waterway are creating a potential fire path into the commercial centre of the town.

There is little if any ongoing maintenance of the waterway planting with the result that branches and in several cases entire trees have fallen into and across the waterway with the result that even a small fire would easily traverse down the waterway precinct and from one bank to the other and then into the park proper.

With the planting of highly volatile indigenous vegetation, the branches and dead leaves left on the ground and the mulching with wood chips over the area it leaves a situation rife for combustion to be started by a carelessly discarded cigarette butt dropped by the side of the footways. DSE have stated that up to 10% of bush fires have been started by this method.


As Melbourne Water's "healthy waterways" programme is very extensive we consider that some significant restrictions should be set to prevent this type of planting being carried out in such close proximity to private and public owned assets, as the fire risk is too significant to ignore. The planting programme should be limited to areas where specific recreational walking tracks are provided and used by people who appreciate the need to be mindful of the fire risk, Coronation Park in Healesville is a good example. Queens Park and similar parks however do not fall into this category, they are areas frequented by the more "general public" including visitors to the area who picnic and enjoy the area with their children and who are generally less aware of the fire risk from discarded cigarette butts. This risk is also exacerbated by the fact that in the case of Queens Park the indigenous planting is being extended right up to the normal footways along the edge of Badger Creek Rd.

Summary


It is fortunate that our area escaped the devastating fires of last summer, but if any lessons are to be learned from the fires of 1939, 1962 and Ash Wednesday 1983, these situations should be being eliminated not increased. There is more than enough research that shows that exotic species of vegetation provide far better fire resistance than indigenous types.

We believe that restrictions should be placed on the replanting of fire prone vegetation within a reasonable distance, at least half a kilometre, of "general use" public parks, public footways (as distinct from recreational walking tracks) and public and private assets. These restrictions should be administered at State Government level and enforced by the CFA, not at the discretion of Local Government.

Yours sincerely,



John D. Anwin



June M. Anwin