

SUBMISSION

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ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Executive Officer
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE Vic 3002

21 May 2007

Submission to the Committee of Inquiry, Impact of Bushfires in Victoria

Background I have been on the land and a member of Stratford CFA for over 45 years. Over this time I have held the office of Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Group Officer and Group Officer. I have been involved in many fires where DSE and CFA have been joint controllers and I feel that the Stratford Group as a whole have an excellent relationship with local DSE Fire Officers

(1) (4) & (5) *Prescriber Burning* While it would be great to have more burning done the window that allows the DSE, CFA to achieve this is small. I feel there are too many restrictions on those in charge of the burn. – A lesson learnt from being involved. -- We need to be more flexible and if the odd one "gets-away" or there is smoke over the road or town, let's live with it as a small price to pay for having a larger area burnt.

Having to have all the land holders, that adjoin an area to be burnt, to agree to the burn is a trap. In some areas the DSE may only have to deal with one landholder, but on the interface at the base of the foothills there maybe twenty landholders effected and only one needs to object and they cannot burn – surely the majority should have the say, not the minority.

(6) (9) *Maintaining Permanent Strategically Placed Firebreaks* May have some value if they are linked to (9) *good serviceable access tracks* that are wide enough for tankers to work from and with turn around areas every 2km or so. Some of this type of work our Group had done for the Caledonian fire some eight years ago and they were of great value during back burning operations this time.

(10) *Climate Change* may or may not have an impact on the scale and intensity of the fires but common sense would tell us that three large alpine fires in eight years should mean a change in the way we manage this area – what are we doing wrong?

(12) *Involvement of local Communities* other than local brigades would be hard to achieve. – Bushfire awareness days we have run in our Group attract only a handful of people. But the ones we have run during the last two alpine fires attracted two to three hundred – the public seemed interested only when they are in obvious danger.

(13) *Other Matters* At our Group level we found it hard during the last two alpine fires to keep up the level of involvement required – some 3,500 hours were put in by our Group this time and this becomes a strain on a volunteer organisation.

However, we are lucky in some ways, as through our own efforts and the CSF Scheme, we haven't only the CFA supplied tankers, but a 1500lt 4 x 4 and a Slip-on unit in Dargo. The two smaller units along with a forest industries supplied twin cab slip-on gives us a very flexible range of vehicles. It is my opinion that CFA do not have enough of this type of units ie slip-on's and 1500lt 4 x 4 and if we are to become more involved in DSE fires this deficiency needs to be addressed. Large tankers on tree-lined lanes are nigh impossible to turn around in smoke impeded visibility

To sum up, I would say yes, we need more prescribed burning, but it is up to the Government to make this easier for DSE and CFA to do so.

Tracks need to be kept open, widened where possible with turn-around to make them safe to work from. Large water points may help but we need rain to fill them, but if the tracks are wide they can take milk-type water tankers to collar tanks at strategic points.

The CFA Brigades on the interface need slip-on and 1500lt tankers – maybe three slip-on's and one small tanker per Group

I would like to re-enforce the need for good co-operation between DSE Staff and local Brigades. At our Group we have excellent co-operation from the DSE Fire Officers in our area, for whom I have the highest regards

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kenneth Baxter".

Kenneth Baxter