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To the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2006/2007 summer bush fires

ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE  
TRADES AND LABOUR

To the chair person or equivalent.

I am a concerned country resident and fire fighter of 12 years

It has been a pleasure in the past to rush out to fires and help save property and possibly lives. In the last few years it has become more of a head ache to attend fires of unknown quantity and duration. What seems to be a simple lightning strike in the bush that should be controlled in a matter of hours ends up being a monumental state wide disaster. I am referring to the last early summer fires that devastated Victoria. In particular the one that I attended on a few occasions was the lightning strike at Mount Terrible near Jamieson. What should have been put out if we had enough equipment, and using repelling crews in my estimation in a reasonable time, was enlarged to the extreme by the actions of D.S.E. back burning operations.

On the first day that I was on the fire scene, the fire, according to the Jamieson Fire Brigade, had got out to about 50 hectares. The plan of attack as it was shown to all of us on the scene was to back burn an area of 6,000 hectares to control this 50 hectare fire. As I said earlier it was very early in summer when this out break occurred and the fire was very slow moving and should have been controlled very easily.

I returned three days later on the same fire scene and we were told to patrol a section of road that the fire was now supposed to burn out to. We waited all morning for the fire, and finally we were instructed to move five kilometres down the road to where the fire had actually reached the road. While we were waiting all morning, there were D.S.E. and Parks Victoria vehicles driving back and forth all the time.

While we were five kilometres down the road extinguishing the flames as they reached the road edge, we heard that the section of road that we were first patrolling, the fire had reached and crossed, and also crossed the Goulburn river. Not at any stage did we get a message from D.S.E. to return to that position to extinguish flames. It was this fire that got away and eventually burned through Gaffneys Creek and Woods Point and beyond. It seems to me that a direct fire attack would have had the best outcome, instead of enlarging the fire to an uncontrollable monster.

This is only my story. I have heard of many similar situations with regard to back burning operations done by the D.S.E.

With regard to global warming it would seem to me that direct fire attack to extinguish the fire would be a far more desirable outcome rather than enlarging the fires to uncontrollable levels.

If the money that was spent trying to control the huge fires that culminated in burning most of the Victorian bush was spent initially on controlling the outbreaks, then there would not be the problems created as a result of these fires. Which include loss of life, loss of property, loss of livelihood, loss of businesses, loss of wildlife, loss of timber and loss of natural flora.

It is ironic that the same authorities that restrict us from gathering fire wood, and stop logging of our native timber are allowed to burn out millions of hectares of bush that could have been otherwise utilised in part. And now it seems that it is fine for the loggers to go into the bush and remove fire damaged tress that they could not touch before. Perhaps the loggers should have been in there in the first place, keeping the tracks open and utilising the timber that now seems to burn down so often.

While I am on the subject of tracks I would like to bring it to your attention that the tracks that had been widened to act as fire breaks are now being reclaimed by pulling back all of the bull dozed trees and placing them across the tracks, and as well the

D.S.E. is digging trenches across the tracks to stop vehicle access. One track that I saw had trenches one half a metre deep and approximately ten metres long and every ten metres up the track for hundreds of metres. Now if we have another uncontrollable fire, no doubt these tracks will have to be opened up again and used as fire breaks. Wouldn't it be a far more sensible idea to keep these tracks open as permanent fire breaks.

The money that the D.S.E. spends on all of this procedure, plus overseas fire fighters would be far better spent on aircraft and machinery and repelling crews in my opinion.

After the fires were finally over, and we no longer had to breathe smoke for weeks on end, I happened to find out that the D.S.E. were planning to do some so called controlled burning operations adjacent to the burnt out area in our district.

Now I would have thought that there had been enough of the Victorian bush burnt out already, but to my amazement they went ahead and burnt out more.

Now I would imagine that millions of animals and birds and whatever would have perished during the fires, and also after the fires, because of loss of habitat and food .

One would think that the remaining pockets of unburnt bush would be a safe haven for any remaining wildlife lucky enough to have survived the first D.S.E. onslaught.

Now they face their second D.S.E. onslaught and possibly no habitat or food source at all.

It is with all this in mind that I think the whole procedure of back burning should be stopped and fire fighting procedures and equipment should be improved to the point of being able to control multiple outbreaks at the same time, so that we don't face Victoria being burnt out every three years as has happened.

I sincerely hope that I am not the only person to make a submission to the enquiry. If I am then God help us all.

Yours truly,  
Russell Picton  
Goughs Bay C.F.A.

