

To: <enrc@parliament.vic.gov.au>
From: "J.I & N.D.Endacott" <nakaenda@vicnet.net.au>
Date: 05/22/2007 09:23AM
Subject: Fire Impact

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24 MAY 2007

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBMISSION

Secretary,
Environment & Natural Resources Committee
Level 8
35 Spring St
Mrlb. 3000

NO. 100 part A

21/5/07

Dear Sir,

I am a retired forester who was taught the value of good land management.

Many people want us to abandon the forest fire facts we absorbed from the fire researchers from the 1950s onwards, and from the wealth of hard-won fire experience from our working lives as foresters.

They want fuel reduction burning scrapped because they think it is damaging to the ecosystem and biodiversity.

But I want to tell your Committee about the impact of ferocious wildfire on birdlife. The 2003 north eastern bushfire covered an area of 1.3 million ha. Over the previous decade or more, this region had been blessed with detailed bird population studies which had been carried out by several highly respected ornithologists. After the 2003 fire, this background database was there on the record, and along with the DSE maps of fire spread and intensity, it was possible for ornithologists with forestry as well as ecological skills to develop estimates of the loss of bird life arising from this 1.3 million hectare calamity.

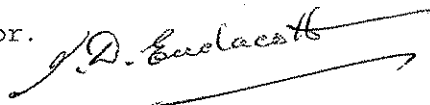
The sobering grand total of probable bird fatalities from the 2003 fire stands at 9.5 million! Nature would have taken at least 10 years to make a reasonable replacement of this huge loss of biota, provided no further disasters had occurred. The question I put to your Committee is: when one considers the "add on" effect of the Dec.2006-March 2007 fires, how big a slice of Victorian forest biodiversity has been seriously compromised during the past four years? How much horror is involved when we add on the loss of mammals, invertebrates, flora, and soil and water values etc. etc.?

If throughout the post - 1939 era, those forest landscapes had been diligently treated and managed in the manner which we foresters are now recommending ~~(and Mr Chenery opposes)~~ those misfortunes would not have occurred. They could have been warded off by effective fire suppression strategies and procedures.

Yours sincerely,

Norman Endacott B.Sc.For.

(Retired Forester)



24 MAY 2007

Executive Officer,
 Environment & Natural Resources Committee
 Parliament House
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 East Melbourne 3002
 enr@parliament.vic.gov.au

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
 RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION

NO. 100 part B

**Inquiry into the Impact of Public Land Management Practices on
 Bushfires in Vic.**

Submission to 13 points Terms of Reference

I intend to answer this list selectively. Some I have little interest in, some I do not have time to deal with, and some I do not have access to enough material.

(3) "The impact of prescribed burning and recent wildfires ..."

I have written separately, making the point that the two calamitous bushfires within the last four years have inflicted horrendous damage to the whole range of values we hold dear, quite apart from the human assets. I focussed on bird populations – the only environmental asset which I could quickly quantify. I virtually used bird populations to typify the whole environment.

With this sort of apocalyptic damage hanging over the head of the community any summer, we must use every economically practicable action and plan to strengthen the hands of the firefighters. And the first of those weapons is an ongoing well-planned, well-funded and professionally executed fuel reduction burning programme. Not a grudging minimal effort around "Asset Protection Zones", as recommended by Bruce Esplin, but over the greater part of our inflammable forest estate. The long range objective would be to create by a rolling, cyclic burning programme, a forest mosaic whose fine fuel load pattern ranges from almost zero to 10 tonnes per hectare. This would replace the 30 –50 tonnes per hectare prevailing over past decades.

This FRB regime must be done well and carefully. If it has the collateral effect of slightly modifying the understory and ground vegetation, so be it!
 I cannot imagine it significantly impacting fauna or catchments.

I take a diametrically opposite view to Bruce Esplin, who says that our country communities must learn to live in the midst of these periodic catastrophies, and those more irrational activist people who believe that people should not live in forested parts of Victoria, except in "fortified" towns.

(4) The Reporting Process Applicable to Prescribed Burning Programmes.

Part of the obligatory conditions of my FRB Programme would be the maintenance of a meticulous map recording process, so the burning intervals are maintained and the fine fuel loads kept within the 0-10 tph limits.

(6) The Effectiveness of Maintaining Permanent, Strategically Placed Firebreaks...

These fell out of favour with Forest Services in the early part of the 20th century, when the development of earth-moving machinery facilitated the economical construction of networks of forest roads.

What is proposed is the clearing of all vegetation to form a Firebreak of extraordinary width (eg the Bracks Government's political decision to commit itself to one along the northern watershed boundary of the Thompson Catchment). This is created with the notion that it will remain in place in perpetuity as a continuing functional barrier to fire movement. The planners are taking an enormous punt. They assume that the future fire will behave cooperatively, in terms of fuel loadings, wind, ember attack and many intangibles.

Such efforts may only be justified to protect a concentrated extremely high value human asset, within a small finite area. A sad example of an opportunity sadly missed was the Mt Stromlo Observatory near Canberra. (Also, incidentally, where were the helicopters ?)

(7) The Provision & Maintenance of Large Water Points....

I am vehemently opposed to placing more faith and spending even more money on Aerial Fire Bombing.

This alleged hitech method of forest firefighting is misguided and non-productive in bringing fire perimeters under control in difficult circumstances. What's more they are destructive to forest firefighting, in that they are horrendously expensive and steal millions of dollars from fire budgets which must in turn economise in truly rewarding aspects of fire prevention and protection e.g building up, maintaining and training a capable *forestfire* fighting service, and enhancing road and track access. These desirable aspects of public land fire management are constantly limited by penny-pinching because of false beliefs that Fire Bombing will solve the problem. It won't. I would like to ask DSE a niggling question : If aerial fire bombing is such a magical thing, why hasn't DSE got an accreditation for it, from one or more of the 6 or 8 top-notch Fire Research scientists who are the supreme authorities on forest fire matters ? Do you want me to name them ?

(9) The Provision and Maintenance of Serviceable Access Tracks and Signage to Assist with ... Emergency Requirements

This ranks a close second behind FRB as the prime solution to the Bush Fire Problem.

In the dying days of the Forests Commission (1970s ?) it allowed its admirable forest roading programme to wither on the vine and lapse. One can interpret this as a tacit acceptance that "enough's enough, the programme is complete". But mercifully, the Commission kept its commitment to the maintenance of the huge asset it had created over 30 years.

But the last 4 years proves to us, with the new phenomenon of multiple dry lightning strikes on the grand scale, that we need more & more & more vehicular access to the forest. Roads, tracks and helicopter pads. Therefore my judgement is that a new supplementary tranche of forest roading should be commenced on Victorian public forest, and this must embrace both State Forest and Parks and Reserves. The attitude of Parks Victoria against road and track access must be terminated.

(11) & (12) *Whether Additional ... & The Involvement ...*

Since the mid-1990s I have had a strong desire to see an enhancement, development and extension of the functions of the CFA's COMMUNITY FIREGUARD PROGRAMME, within Victoria's Forest Interface Areas, where unbridled residential development has taken place in inflammable dangerous public forest areas. Furthermore I have urged DSE to negotiate a partnership arrangement with CFA and Parks Victoria, to give the project full government support and high chance of success.

On several occasions throughout the past decade, I have spent much time lobbying government agencies in this cause. I have spoken to, and written reams of advocacies, to these agencies:

- mid 1990s – CFA Lilydale – continuing liaison & lobbying
- 1997 - Written statement to Coroner's Court – i.c.w. Ferny Creek Fire
- 1998 - DSE - i.c.w. Proposed Amendments to Forests Act
- 2003 - Within my submission to Esplin Enquiry.
- 2005 - Within my attendance, lobbying and written presentations as Stakeholder, in DSE Firecode Review Panel

None of these attempts have borne fruit. I cannot see any result for all this time and effort spent.

I do not intend to add to this waste of time here, in patiently explaining the need for such a programme, from the viewpoints of the forest management authority, the CFA and the neighbouring landowners and residents. There is also of course the huge benefit to be gained to the causes of forest fire safety of lives and property, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the government's "fire fighting machine".

But if I can get to one of your public meetings in the coming months, I may have the opportunity to enlarge on my advocacy for my version of "COMMUNITY FIREGUARD".

(13) *Miscellaneous Matters*

a) *Public Information During Bushfires*

There is enormous room for improvement in the organization of the media in keeping the public informed on a daily basis of all the things which are going on, regarding the suppression of a going wildfire.

I find it utterly inappropriate for the CFA to have a monopoly of information to the media and thence to the community, on what is essentially a FOREST FIRE - FIGHTING OPERATION. Having watched this exercise every day for week after week for over two months, I have been appalled at the failure to communicate the facts of situations.

b) *Ongoing Firefighting Records, Logs etc*

One has not yet seen compilations of daily fire progress reports of the 2006-7 fire, therefore one cannot yet pass judgement. But the voluminous progress reports of the 2003 fire fell far short of what is required to explain the impotence of the large firefighting forces involved and the fire's wide spread.

The element of accountability seems to be lacking in these huge "incidents". I think it is essential for the community at large to be able to access and understand the profundities behind the failures as well as the successes.

c) *Finances*

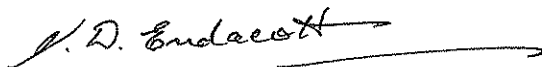
This forest fire problem is a huge sink for taxpayers' money, asserting itself at unpredictable intervals. The suspicion is there that those funds have been squandered by the Government, primarily to pacify the electorate and convince it that "all that is possible is being done".

I would point to these nodes of suspicion :

- 1) water bombers
- 2) bringing in considerable numbers of overseas firefighters
- 3) failure to hold the fire control organization accountable for daily progress with the suppression task
- 4) failure of the organization to espouse the trusted and tried techniques of forest fire control which were "normal" in days gone by
- 5) Government secrecy in failing to divulge the detailed costs of the last two forest fire catastrophies.

The Bracks Government was pressured to set up a Royal Commission on the 2003 fires. The pressure should now be renewed, for the dual catastrophes.

Failing that, at least the Auditor-General should be brought in, perhaps focussing on Finance.



Signed : Norman Endacott B.Sc. For.
(Retired Forester)