

Extract from
Submission to Mr Tony Pearce
Inspector General for Emergency Management

[REDACTED]
17 March 2015

Introduction

This submission is presented in the context of 53 years involvement in bushfire research, which incorporates a decade of disaster education and fire meteorology policy development. I have some 53 published papers and have appeared as an expert witness on at least ten occasions. The opinions expressed are frank and fearless and can be expanded and justified personally.

Basic Victorian Bushfire facts.

There are some irrefutable facts about the drastic state of the bushfire threat to Southern Australia. These are....

1. We have a failed fire management policy and practice in Southern Australia especially Victoria. The failed fire management is resulting in an increasing threat to our forest environment (especially tree deaths – Jurskis¹), water supplies (Conedera et al²), life and property loss and a severe decrease in our quality of life.
2. The thermal scale of wildfire in Victoria exceeds by a factor of 20 our ability to extinguish.
3. Disaster scale wildfires occur about once in every 30 years (Long³, but will become more frequent as fuel levels continue to rise.
4. “Blow up” fire weather (Parker, Berry and Reeder⁴ and Peters and Waugh⁵) causes disaster fires when ignitions and fuel are present.
5. Ignitions cannot be prevented.

¹ Jurskis, V., *Firestick Ecology: Fair dinkum science in plain English*. In preparation (Eden, N.S.W.).

² Conedera, Peter, Marxer, Forster, Rickenman and Re. *Consequences of forest fires on the hydrogeological response of mountain catchments: A case study of the Riale Buffage, Ticino, Switzerland*. *Earth Surfaces and Landforms*, 28, 117-129 (2003)

³ Long, *A climatology of extreme fire weather days in Victoria*, *Aust meteorological Magazine* 55, (2006) 3-18

⁴ Parker, Berry and Reeder, *The influence of tropical cyclones on heat waves in Southeastern Australia*, *Geophysical Research Letters* 40, 1-7 (2013).

⁵ Peters and Waugh, *Rosby Wave Breaking in the Southern Hemisphere Wintertime Upper Troposphere*, *Monthly Weather Review*, 131, 2623-2634

6. South East and South West Australian fuel levels have risen over the last three decades as mismanagement has been imposed on our environment by misguided “green” ideology, political failure and vested interests and have now reached the most dangerous for the last 50.000 years.
7. The threat is ignored. (Malseed and Packham⁶).
8. No Government and its machinery is entitled to knowingly put its citizens deliberately in harms way. The current land management policy and practice puts citizens in peril. Such acts with full knowledge of the consequences could fall within the definition of a crime against humanity and when the next fire disaster occurs and perhaps thousands die in Victoria those responsible should be referred to an International Court.

Four steps to solution.

Four conditions must be met to achieve a safe and healthy environment in South East and South West Australia.

1. We must have an understanding of the physical characteristics of bushfire. The laws of thermodynamics cannot be ignored. We do not have all the knowledge but we have sufficient to make our rural lands safe and our forests healthy (Peet⁷, McArthur,⁸ Tolhurst and Cheney⁹Byram¹⁰ etc).
2. The historical role of fire in forming the Australian Environment needs to be understood and respected. Gammage has provided enough evidence of Aboriginal use of fire to provide a solid basis for land management (Gammage,¹¹ King¹², UN Food and Agriculture Organization Sun City South Africa ¹³).
3. The actual effectiveness and techniques of fuel management must be demonstrated. Western Australia has 37 years of well documented experience of large scale fuel management and its effectiveness. (Sneeuwjagt¹⁴)¹⁵.

⁶ Malseed and Packham. (2014) www.elthamdeathtrap.com

⁷ Sneeuwjagt and Peet. (1985)*Forest Fire Behaviour Tables for Western Australia*. Department of Conservation and Land Management, Perth ,WA

⁸ Luke and McArthur(1978) *Bushfires in Australia*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

⁹ Tolhurst and Cheney(1999). *Synopsis of the Knowledge Used in Prescribed Burning in Victoria*. Dept of Natural Resources and Environment, Melbourne

¹⁰ Byram (1959) *Combustion of Forest Fuels* , in K.P. Davis , Ed. *Forest Fire Control and Use*, McGraw Hill, New York

¹¹ Gammage (2011) *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, How Aborigines made Australia., Allen and Unwin Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland and London

¹² King (1963) *The Influence of Colonization on the forests and the prevalence of bushfires in Australia*. CSIRO Div Physical Chemistry. Mimeographed report.

¹³ F.A.O. of the U.N. *Vth International Wildland Fire Conference in Sun City, South Africa*. www.fao.org/docrep/014/am663c/am663e00.pdf

¹⁴ Sneeuwjagt , *The Effectiveness of prescribed Burning in the Control of Large Eucalypt Forest Fires*. Department of Environment and Conservation, Perth. Also in FAO Vth International Wildland Fire Conference.

¹⁵ See graph below.

4. The national will need to once again make our forests healthy and safe. The destruction of appropriate fuel management policy and practice has resulted from the efforts of “green” ideology, political expediency, bureaucracies self interest¹⁶ and media ignorance. (Underwood¹⁷)

The primacy of life concept is a logical error as rendering our environment healthy and safe using the Aboriginal use of fire will ensure that life, property and water supplies are also safe and healthy.

Even as far back as 1987 Gill, Christian and Moore in the Australian Journal of Ecology stated “ However, if fuel weights were less than 8 t ha⁻¹ the potential number of ‘uncontrollable’ fires would be near zero.¹⁸

Conclusion

Unless the 5% target is doubled or preferably tripled a massive bushfire disaster will occur, the forest and Alpine environment will decay and be damaged possibly beyond repair and homes and people incinerated.

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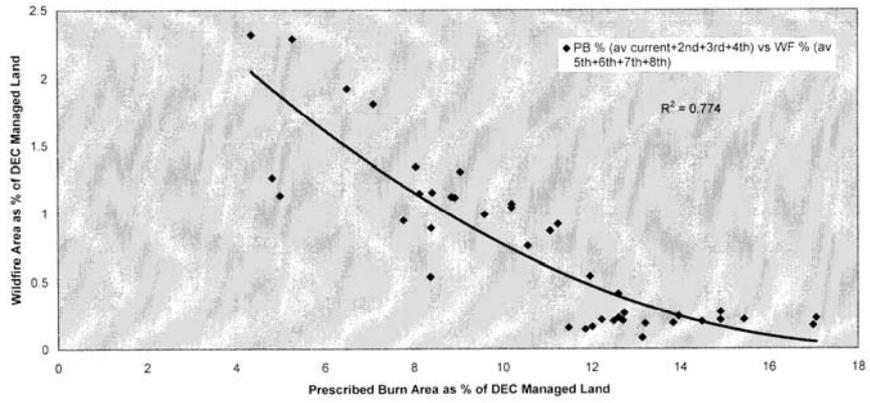
¹⁶ Dexter and Hodgson (2015) *Fire management on Public Land – Victoria burns while its Bureaucracy Fiddles*, Dexter and Hodgson Mulgrave and Parkdale.

¹⁷ Underwood,R., (2007) *Who are the beneficiaries of large high intensity bushfires?* 3pp, yorkgum@westnet.com.au also *Bushfire politics and management in Australia* (2010) 3rd nt. Fire Behaviour (Attached) and Fuels Conference, Spokane Washington USA, Oct 25-29 2010 (Abstract attached)

¹⁸ Gill,Christian and Moore, (1987) *Bushfire incidence, fire hazard and fuel reduction burning*”. Australian Journal of Ecology 12, 299-306

Figure 10: Prescribed Burn Area Percentage (average over 4 years) vs Wildfire Area Percentage (average for 4 years)

Prescribed Burn Area % (averaged over 4 years) vs Wildfire Area % (averaged for 5th to 8th years)



$$y = 6.2 e^{-.221 x}$$