

I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. It is essential that we learn from the experience of the wildfires that happened in Tasmania over the summer of 2015/16.

It is clear that there were insufficient resources available for the Tasmanian Fire Service, Forestry Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service to contain the fires in the World Heritage Areas (WHA) including the Central Plateau, Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park, Walls of Jerusalem, and Franklin – Gordon Wild Rivers National Parks.

This means that firefighting authorities – who did an incredible job of bringing these bushfires under control – needed to prioritise human assets like townships at the height of the fires. This, in turn, meant that insufficient resources were available to contain many remote area fires (including at Lake Mackenzie, Lake Ball and the February Plains), resulting in major damage to vegetation which is not fire adapted.

Rather than individually address the terms of reference (ToR), I would like to make a number of points and recommendations that I hope you will consider. They all fall within the ToR of the Inquiry.

1/ It is clear there are inadequate resources available to Tasmania firefighting authorities in fire seasons where there are extensive fires in western, north western and central Tasmania. This is shown by the fact that interstate and federal resources were needed to bring the fires under control.

For instance:

- Military personnel and equipment was needed to assist with logistics: Australian air force planes were used to transport fire-fighters from interstate and assist with the establishment of base camps near the fires.

- Large aircraft from mainland Australia were needed to tackle the fires from the air: Three ‘Large Air Tankers’ (LAT) in the form of a DC10-Bomber and two C130-Bombers were deployed to bomb the fires with water and fire retardant.

- interstate fire crews were needed to get all fires under control. While it is standard practise for firefighting authorities to support each other where possible, the delay in getting interstate crews into remote area fires meant they were not able to be contained while they were small, resulting in significant loss of communities that are not fire adapted, especially stands of Pencil Pines (*Athrotaxis cupressoides*) and cushion plant communities.

Because interstate remote area crews were not deployed in the field until the fires had been burning for 10 days, the Committee needs to consider whether there was an error made in assessing the scale of the fires and the decision making processes around requesting interstate support.

In particular the Inquiry should consider whether a new national remote area firefighting unit or capacity needs to be created, which is able to be deployed to fires in the national park and WHA estate in Australia, and Tasmania in particular.

There is a clear role for the federal government to intervene and provide additional resources to fight future fires because the Minister for the Environment is the Minister responsible for World Heritage properties.

Recommendations

The Inquiry should consider whether additional resources (staff and equipment) need to be deployed to Tasmania on a permanent basis to fight future fires. Given that the TFS says it has sufficient resources at present, it is essential that this new capacity come from the federal government.

I recommend that the federal government:

- Recognise the catastrophic threat to key Outstanding Universal Values of the Tasmanian Wilderness and other major natural attributes posed by fire;
- Report on wild fires as a routine part of its State of Conservation reports;
- Provide coordination and financial support to enable the Tasmanian Government to develop and implement a long-term bushfire response plan designed to protect Outstanding Universal Value and other environmental attributes in Tasmania;
- Oversee the review of the Management Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness to ensure wildfires and their threats to Outstanding Universal Values are adequately addressed.

2/ There is substantial evidence that climate change may have made this seasons fires worse, because of the warmer and drier than average conditions in western Tasmania that lead to the scale of the fires. I note that research carried out for the National Parks Service shows an increase in 'dry lightning' strikes in recent years, which is consistent with predictions from climate scientists.

Therefore, the presence of climate change enhanced fire needs to be considered the new reality of managing the WHA.

Recommendations

The Committee should recommend that the federal government:

- Provide financial resources for additional research into the relationship between climate change, bushfires and ecology in Australia, and the Tasmanian WHA in particular
- Bolster its efforts to research, model and tackle climate change
- The Committee must accept that without acting decisively to radically reduce Australia's contribution to climate change, we will face ever worse fire seasons like the one experienced in Tasmania in early 2016. The federal government should set its policy on energy and exports accordingly.

The federal government needs to proactively work with the Tasmanian government to do the following:

- Review, modify and publish action plans for responding to outbreaks of wildfires and recognise these in the Tasmanian WHA property's revised management plan
- develop and publish long-term plans for ameliorating threats to Outstanding Universal Value and other natural and cultural attributes.

The impacts of this summer's fires will be felt for decades, if not centuries. It is imperative that we learn from them and ensure there is adequate protection for WHA in future fire seasons.