

Summary of submission into Efficacy of Land Management Practices

This submission proposes a number of initiatives to assist sustainable land management practices by fundamentally empowering landowners to take necessary measures to protect their properties from fire and to assist in the fighting of wild fires and in catastrophic situations.

Landowners include freehold property owners, leaseholders and government agencies responsible for crown lands. This includes the three tiers of government agencies.

The submission includes the following initiatives as well as several other initiatives :

- Deferment of construction of unnecessary infrastructure projects such as sports stadiums and Olympic bids until the necessary drought mitigation and fire prevention measures are established
- Changes to the electoral system to reverse the current imbalance between city and rural electorates. Cities do not need 10 or 20 electorates in a small area as the issues are similar to all electorates whereas rural electorates have more diverse issues across the nation.
- Prohibit third party influence on a property owner's fundamental right to establish fire prevention and protection measures on his property.
- Legislate to require the establishment or protection of vegetation along watercourses and strategic boundaries within properties to facilitate fauna movement and fuel reduction burns, erosion protection and shelter and protection to stock.
- Clear along all roadways to prevent trees from falling across roadways and evacuation routes. One tree across a road can lead to numerous deaths as has happened in the past.
- Establish fauna crossings at locations where fauna paths intersect roadways to limit random road kills on road ways
- Establish dedicated fire fighting water sources in regional areas.
- Invoke a rural fire levy in cities to allow proper management of crown lands and fire fighting personnel and equipment.

Page 1

Submission to inquiry into Efficacy of Land Management Practices

The problem with current land management strategies is that the responsibility for land management has been taken away from the landowners and lies with the green vote in the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. Successive governments pandering of the green vote means that

- Management of National Parks and State lands is negligible and under resourced.
- Land owners are unable to clear around their houses, construct firebreaks and otherwise manage their properties to mitigate the effects of fire.
- A “it will rain someday” strategy is the only one in place. Wait long enough and it will rain so Governments play the waiting game and after it rains they don’t have to do anything.
- Governments are more focussed on sports Stadiums, the Olympics and cross river rail and urban freeway projects to provide adequate drought protection infrastructure which also has the added advantage of providing sources of water for fire fighting. This last lot of fires saw landowner’s dams drained of their precious water in the worst drought in history to

fight fires that they could have perhaps averted if they (the landowner) had control over fire prevention and mitigation measures on their own properties.

Government is focussed on urban votes and has a blind spot for the bush. What is fundamentally needed is for dramatic changes to the current system.

My suggestions are:

- Government must make the land owner (includes State and Federal governments), responsible for land management practices that mitigate fire on their own properties. Landowners must be given the authority to:
 - Clear around their homes and outbuildings,
 - Provide firebreaks within and around their properties.
 - Construct dams, weirs and bores, water harvest where possible and other water storage measures to provide irrigation (green crops are unlikely to burn) and provide designated fire fighting water reserves just as happens in all cities and towns.
- Government must invest in major drought prevention infrastructure instead of ridiculous sports stadiums and just as ridiculous enterprises like the Olympics and Commonwealth Games. These are things we can do after we have all of the necessary infrastructure and resources in place. They will never be useful in a drought or fire unless of course you allow farmers to agist cattle on the over watered playing surfaces. And why haven't you suggested that already?
- Third parties who prevent landowners from undertaking timely and appropriate land management and fire prevention practices must be open to litigation. This is the only way to stop the crazies from third party interference in landowner's rights.
- Establishment of a good neighbour policy that requires neighbours to jointly manage their boundaries by establishing cleared and trafficable firebreaks on both sides of common fence

Page 2

lines. The width of fire breaks should be at least 20 metres either side of the fence so that a burning tree can fall within each property. This strategy will:

- Allow two way access along each fence line for emergency fire fighting personnel and machinery.
 - It will mitigate the damage to boundary fences. This is a huge cost to property owners and can significantly affect their ability to recover quickly from fires.
 - It provides a network of firebreaks across the terrain to allow back-burning etc to occur quickly to limit the area of fire impact.
 - It facilitates fuel reduction burns to allow regular removal of excess fuel and reduce the intensity of fires.
- Clearing of road boundaries. Exit routes in times of crisis are critical for the preservation of life. A single large tree can fall across a road and trap people resulting in loss of life. Cleared

road boundaries together with the property owner's firebreak as described above will ensure access for emergency vehicles as well as providing safe exit routes for affected persons in emergency circumstances. I am aware that in some instances this strip of vegetation is the only fauna route available due to over-clearing in the past, however, the safety of firefighters and people is a far higher priority.

- I am aware that the green groups will contest the above strategy but offer the following strategy as a compromise. Land management plans on rural properties should contain strips of retained, or in the case of cleared land, re-established bushland to preserve or provide fauna paths across properties. These paths can follow natural river, creek and stream systems as well as along alignments that facilitate fauna movements as well as land management and pastoral and agricultural purposes. The strategy has benefits for both the landowner and the environment, namely
 - Landowner
 - Provides shelter for stock
 - Provides windbreaks for agriculture
 - Effectively "subdivides" the property into various paddocks with benefits for land and stock management as well as paddock rotations for tick control or for soil management while fields lie fallow.
 - Adds to visual amenity by prettying up the landscape. Check out the tree lined paddocks in NZ and the UK that create a mosaic to enhance beautiful landscapes.
 - Environment
 - The strips of land currently retained in the road reserve encourage fauna to travel in close proximity to roads where the likelihood of road kill, damage to vehicles and injury or death to road users is increased. Road crossings by animals are ad hoc and pose a continual risk for motorists. Removal of these strips will encourage wildlife to utilise the vegetation strips described above which are generally at right angles to the road. This means that fauna road crossings can be determined and appropriate signage and even fauna crossing measures such as tunnels, aerial crossings and fencing options utilised at specific road crossings to protect both the fauna and motorists.
 -

Page 3

- The provision of fauna paths within properties will be more effective at catering for fauna movements than strips of vegetation along roadways. Can you see a possum telling his mates that you travel along the Bruce Highway verge for two kilometres and then turn right into the Cooroy Rd verge to get home. You are right, it is a nonsense.
- We will eventually wind up with more trees thereby improving the carbon offset and increasing oxygen return into the atmosphere. This may even be a source of carbon credits for farmers to improve the economic viability for farmers.

- All landowners must be given the “as of right” permission to take effective measures to protect their properties. Even urban greenies must accept this reality as they live behind security screens, security systems and security cameras. This encompasses the right to clear vegetation within the proximity of houses and outbuildings, remove overhanging trees or those that pose a risk of falling onto houses and outbuildings (This last point also applies to urban situations). I am sure that not only will this protect property and life but may also reduce insurance premiums for those properties which actively protect their infrastructure. Note this is the case with premiums on properties that have security measures in cities so why not the same benefits for the bush? This would be a terrific outcome for reducing cost of living costs in the bush.
- The State will need to decide where development can occur in forested areas. It is evident in high density development areas that virtually all trees would need to be removed. We have many examples of houses spotted within dense bushland which will be lost if a fire comes through. The State will need to decide if this is an acceptable scenario or whether lot sizes in such environments should be of sufficient size to allow an adequate balance between fire protection for infrastructure and life, protection of natural values and fauna paths. I suspect that in some instances it will be better if such developments did not proceed or the required large lot sizes to achieve the above balance preclude the development being economically viable.
- Weed and feral animal eradication are major costs for State land management but are eminently necessary to preserve the natural values of the NPs. My suggestions in this regard are:
 - Utilise community groups and clubs to undertake these activities. These would include service clubs, land-care organisations and sporting shooters clubs. The activities would be carried out under permit and under the supervision of NP rangers or other State authorities. Special rangers from local indigenous land custodians would be eminently suitable for such works. The income from permit fees will assist in offsetting the costs of land management.
 - Open up sections of parks for appropriate commercial activities such as elevated walkways, flying foxes, guided walks and camping activities. This will improve interaction with parks and defer responsibility for land management of those areas

Page 4

to the commercial enterprise as a condition of a lease. Again permit fees will offset land management costs.

- Allow cattle on sections of national parks and State forests especially in drought periods
- Allow “as of right” tourist activities on rural properties. This will allow another income stream for our farmers and provide them the additional funds necessary to improve fire and land management practices on their lands. It would also defer any loss of productivity created by loss of land retained as fauna paths as outlined previously. In addition it creates

potential for jobs so that young persons are more likely to remain in the bush. Very often the current overwhelming weight of bureaucracy stifles such initiatives. Make it simple. People want a real bush experience not a five star city experience in the bush!!

- It is inevitable that the State will need to impose a modest charge for NP visitation. At the moment it is free but no one will mind paying to access NPs as long as the amenities, attractions (both natural and commercial) and natural elements are preserved. And especially if there is evidence that fire, weed and feral animal management practices are working. Such fees can be overcome by an annual pass payment of say \$50. I have one for NSW so why not one for Qld?
- A rural fire levy should be imposed on all cities and towns in Australia to ensure that rural fire brigades are adequately staffed with permanent fire fighters and proper vehicles and equipment. If the taxes on the bush are spent on sports stadiums in the cities then it is fair that city taxes are levied to help the bush.
- As stated earlier, specific dams and water points should be established across the country to provide water for fire fighting just as fire hydrants are provided in cities.
- Change the electoral system back to an area basis rather than the current one vote one value system. The rapid growth of cities ensures that the city biased pork barrelling of governments ensures and propagates the imbalance of funding between the city and the bush. The pendulum has swung way too far to the city and the impacts on the bush are now evident.
- Immigrants must be directed to regional areas in the first instance to ensure regional communities have a base population to support business, schools and services. The classification of the Gold Coast and Perth as “regional” centres is a joke and an insult to the those in the bush.

In conclusion, I know Governments rely on the green and city vote to remain in government. This greenie base is established in the major city areas. They mean well but have no idea what they are talking about most of the time when it comes to issues that affect the bush. Their arguments are emotive rather than reasoned. My experience is that no amount of logic or reasoned debate will overcome irrational emotional ranting. It will need the courage and determination of our fire

Page 5

fighters(mostly volunteers)to do what is right for the protection of parks, property and people where the burden clearly lies with proper strategic policy led by government. Fire fighters die while governments have fire works displays and build sports stadiums which are not needed.

You will need to impose appropriate strategies like those described above while the iron is still hot (probably not a good pun in the circumstances) and the images of devastated parks, destroyed property, shattered lives and burned-alive stock and fauna are still vivid in people’s minds. You have the high moral ground at the moment so please use it to invoke sound strategies to minimise the risk of such events occurring in the future and the mitigating the impacts to life, property and the environment.