



**Committee Secretary**  
**House Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires**

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**INQUIRY INTO THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES**

Dear Sir / Madam,

My family and I live on 17 ha in Wooragee and the recent Edorado fire came within 500 m of our house where the CFA put in a control line that held. As a member of the local CFA I was involved in fighting the fires both in Corryong and the local Eldorado fires.

It would not only be good for the committee to travel throughout the North-East, but it would be better if the committee actually sat some where in the North-East, like at Beechworth, so to be central to where the fires were.

The Eldorado fire was so hot that it was not stopped until it reached open farmland in Indigo Valley. The CFA tried to stop it at the Chiltern Beechworth road but could not because the trees came up to both sides of the road and the fire spotted over. If the sides of the road were cleared 20 m on either side then the CFA might have been able to stop it at this point.

The damage to the state forest was enormous as most wild life and up to 80% of the trees appear to be dead. The only wild life to survive was the kangaroos and wallabies. This winter could see a lot of erosion as the soil is just dust with no root system to hold it together. All the existing dry wood both standing and on the ground was consumed by the fire and has been replaced by dead green wood standing and on the ground. A lot of the standing trees that have been killed by the drought and the fire will fall in the coming months and years. Neighbors had all their fences that are adjoining the forest destroyed as control lines were by necessity put some 20 m inside the private property. Some of the farms had their pastures destroyed as the CFA either could not or would not put in control lines in to stop the destruction. There was at least two examples that I know of in the Eldorado fire where CFA trucks were at the fire and stayed at the farm house (following orders), while the farmers of those houses were at the fire edge trying to put it out and control the fire to stop it burning their pasture.

Factors that contributed to the fire were: hot weather conditions, the Drought that made every thing more dry than usual, the amount of dry fuel on the ground, the stretched resources of the CFA, and the lack of appropriate management of the forest leading up to the fire. The amount of fuel on the ground meant that the fire burnt hotter and did more damage to the trees. I am of the opinion that if more fire wood collection and control burns had been conducted at time when the fire burnt less hot and in smaller areas that the reduced fuel load on the ground would have resulted in a fire that was less hot and so would have done less damage and been easier to control. Landholder not being allowed to clean an appropriate break (20 m) between the forest and their fence (that were constructed totally at their expense) was the major cause of the fire destroying their fences.

The operation of the local CFA was commendable and a lot more damage would have occurred without their efforts. The central command however seemed to have people with very little local knowledge making decisions that appear to make little sense. Some examples of this were the decision to protect assets like buildings and let the grassland burn. This appears to me to be a change in CFA policy to fight the fires where it is safe to do so. Also letting the grassland burn put more buildings at risk, destroyed the asset of the grass in a drought year, and did nothing to stop the fire! Another example was bringing in of two wheel drive trucks in the hills that could not be used as the country was to steep for them. If people with better local knowledge had been asked these trucks could have been directed to the flatter areas where they would have been of some use.

Looking to the future of the Mt Pilot State Forest it appears that there will be an enormous amount of dead wood in the forest and 12 months time as this dries out will become and major fire risk if it is not removed. What better way to remove it than to allow the collection of firewood in the forest. It would be sad to see this resource not used and a repeat of this years fires happen again in the near future at the decision of the people that sit in their homes heated by reticulated gas. A service not provided to the Beechworth area, and so have a greater need for the use of the renewable resource of wood for heating.

In conclusion my recommendations are the following:

- ❖ The roads that are designated as control roads be cleared of trees 10 meters on either side.
- ❖ That a 20 meter cleared area be established between the forests and private land fencing.
- ❖ That the CFA revert to its policy of fighting the fires and not just protecting asset.
- ❖ That the CFA make better use of the local fire fighters knowledge in how they fight the fires.
- ❖ That fire wood collection be an ongoing part of forest management to reduce the amount of dry combustible fuel.
- ❖ That control burns of small areas at a time to allow so animals can regenerate the area and not be totally wipe out.

I would like to thank you for your consideration of my points of view and look forward to your report.

