



8/5/03.

Committee Secretary,
Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. ACT. 2600.

Submission No.298

Dear Sir,

Please accept this and the enclosed letters as my submission to the Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires.

As you can see by the enclosed copies of letters forwarded to Mr Bob Debus, Minister for the Environment in the NSW Government, and Mr Bob Carr the Premier of NSW, I have during recent times had great concerns about the dangers of raging out of control bushfires to our communities and our people. These concerns have been created by the out of context rules and regulations forced upon us by people who do not understand that along with the beauty of our bush there lies an incredible threat which if not properly attended to and controlled, will cause the devastation which happened in our district and over vast areas of NSW, the ACT and Victoria during this last summer.

There are three absolutely essential and uncompromising points which must be adopted immediately. I stress immediately because here we are in May and still there have been no significant hazard reduction burns in our area and soon we will have lost our window of opportunity for this year, and next summer will be at least as bad as the last as only a small portion of the ground fuel was consumed by those raging fires then.

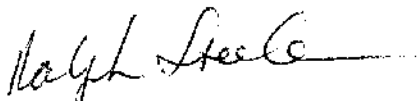
1. Landowners who hold small parcels of land (5 acres or more) on the perimeters of cities and towns should be able to conduct their own hazard reduction burns in consultation with their local bushfire brigade at a time which is most suitable weather wise and at a time which offers maximum opportunity for control and safety.
2. In the case of an out of control fire where backburns are required, those in control of lighting the backburn should first consult with the landowner as to his/her recommendations on what would be the appropriate way to light a backburn on his/her land with respect to the prevailing conditions.
3. Fire pumps and hoses should be supplied to those landowners who have dams or access to water in positions which would be advantageous for backburns as well as out of control fires.

The response which I received from Mr Debus was one phone call from an officer at the rural fire centre Rose Hill in August /02 who agreed with me but confessed that his hands were tied, and from Mr Carr a letter passing responsibility to Mr Debus.

I would like to have a Senior Counsel scrutinise the law to ascertain if legal responsibility should lay with those making decisions which lead to the loss of personal belongings and life.

Please do not hesitate to contact if further information is required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ralph Steele". The signature is written in black ink and includes a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Ralph Steele.