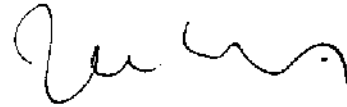


The Committee Secretary,
House Select Committee,
Inquiry into Australian Bushfires,
Department for the House of Representatives,
Parliament House,
Canberra. ACT. 2600.



17th. May, 2003.

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

My Background - Born to dairy farming parents during the 'Black Friday' bushfires in January 1939, bushfires and living as safely as possible with nature in Australia, has been part of my life long learning. Vegetation in the home garden was always chosen from trees recommended by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as being more fire tolerant.

We know wood burns. We also know trees with a high eucalypt oil content not only burn, but explode. No plan by the CFA will prevent this occurring in a fierce bushfire.

As an elected Councillor in the Nillumbik Shire I am very frightened by the culture developed over recent decades where the 'mantra' is 'the environment.' To most green zealots around Nillumbik that means planting trees indigenous to the shire. Only one of these locally indigenous trees is on the list recommended by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) and the CFA as being more fire tolerant.

It seems to have escaped these zealots that human beings are part of our environment. Hoddle surveyed this area in the 1840's. Europeans settled and have been living here for six and seven generations, in many instances farming the inhospitable soil of Nillumbik.

The vegetation is mainly Dry Sclerophyll Forest on stony clay soil. Dry Sclerophyll Forest is 70% intact in Victoria. Nillumbik is surrounded by many thousands of hectares of State and National Parks. There is 850ha. of Council owned land as well as many kilometres of treed road reserves. These areas only need to be visited to observe the lack of fire safety maintenance, the fashionable new mantra wanting fallen logs and ground fuel to remain undisturbed for flora and fauna habitat. The debris constantly shed by eucalypts and the resultant ground fuel build-up is tantamount to preparing for, and ensuring another fire holocaust, as witnessed recently in other areas of Australia during this summer season.

Nillumbik is a metropolitan shire located on the outskirts (the urban fringe) of Melbourne. The State Government is currently in the process of introducing legislation defining Nillumbik as a 'Green Wedge' - conservation of the environment being the priority. Land in the southern part of the shire that, in my childhood was, in the main, agricultural, is now suburbia. Local Government and planners have encouraged the planting of fire-dependent eucalypts. Planners today do not want front fences so that there may be continuous tree canopy from road reserves to the home. Those applying for permits to build homes are required to plant locally indigenous trees. On a 1,000sq.m block in a 'Garden Court' precinct, 1 tree is required to be planted for every 200sq.m. In a 'Semi-Bush' or 'Bush' precinct the requirement is much greater. I have seen an application to build a home in a Residential 1 Zone refused. The required number of trees would preclude there being room to build the home. Madness!

Over the past five years I am only one of many in this shire who have written to State Government, politicians and the head of the CFA asking for leadership in safe planning and vegetation requirements. Prevention rather than reaction.

Nillumbik was very fortunate this season, but the fires will come as they have before. Again, we will suffer the loss of lives, stock, and property. When is someone going to have 'the guts' to allow common sense to again prevail? Are all levels of government going to continue to be blackmailed by the 'greens' in exchange for votes?

In my role as a Councillor, I have chosen to speak out. For that, I am publicly attacked and derided, and called ignorant by newcomers to the area. However, be that as it may, I am accountable to the community who elected me. I stood on a platform of safe planning in this bushfire prone area. It is a platform I intend to uphold.

In my opinion, the CFA organisation is now full of academics, infiltrated by 'greens' and is short on people with on ground, long term, knowledge and experience.

I believe fire prevention measures and requirements for safe planning must be implemented under the direction of the Federal Government.

Cr. Natalie Woodley.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Natalie Woodley".