

R. E. Birch,

18 June, 2003.

Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on recent Australian bushfires
Department of The House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia.

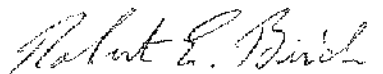
Dear Sir,

Enclosed please find a Submission to the Select Committee'

I have some doubts about the wording of the hurriedly compiled document and can only hope that it does not give offence. Some time ago I wrote to the Hon. Wilson Tuckey, MP, outlining my thoughts on an aspect of the bushfire disaster : Mr Tuckey replied with a well thought-through letter and suggested the possibility of my forwarding a Submission.

Having lived and worked in many countries outside Australia for about 30 years, and having no experience in this type of business, I make this Submission with some hesitation.

Yours sincerely,



Robert E. Birch.

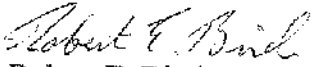


SUBMISSION

House Select Committee on recent Australian bushfires.

I have no personal experience, or knowledge, of bushfire fighting or prevention. However, as for 50 years I survived in a sometimes hazardous occupation in which possible fire and its control were very real considerations, the below mentioned matters are raised.

1. About 12 days before 530 homes in Canberra were lost, together with many others over large rural areas, Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney each wasted millions of dollars on New Year fireworks displays. Those millions of dollars might have been used to bulldoze fire breaks for at least some homes, but bulldozing would have cost money. At that time additional money could not be found for fire fighting or prevention, for hospitals, education, police or other emergency services; nevertheless decision makers wasted millions on childish 20 minute demonstrations of fireworks. Those decision makers should be dismissed; in less tolerant societies that I have experienced they would also have been prosecuted or jailed. Deliberate wasting of public money is just as criminal as deliberately damaging public property.
2. Had instructors and trainees produced the same degree of inefficiency as those fireworks decision makers we trainees would all have killed ourselves 60 years ago, when making RAAF first solo flights.
3. It is good that five Erikson Aircranes, three medium helicopters, and two fixed wing aircraft were leased for fire fighting, but why was it necessary to wait until the fires were facts before putting those machines in the air on scene? I saw experimental helicopters flying in England in 1944, design, construction and reliability advances have been great; and still Australia has no dedicated fire bomber. Aircraft are expensive, so too are bushfires!
4. Present day Australia seems incapable of decisions that extend beyond the next elections, other than for defence and political perks of course.
5. The CFC should solve many problems and I wish it well; time will tell.
6. It would be appropriate to resurrect a cry from the heart that was in everyday use during my father's service in WWI, viz "Wake up Australia".


Robert E. Birch,

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