



*Ken Davis*  
16 July 03

Committee Secretary  
House Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra A.C.T. 2600.

**Submission No.445**

Dear Sir / Madam,

I write this letter to you in the hope that you will listen to what I have to say so that another catastrophe such as you all experienced early this year in and around Canberra and surrounding areas, fires which had anyone down there who is in charge of these services to protect property and people from Wild Fires and Bushfires had any experience in such work this disaster would never have happened.

I will tell you all exactly what has to be done to prevent such a disaster happening again but I must warn you that it costs money to put preventative measures in place to ensure the next time fires start that you will be able to prevent a repeat of this years disaster happening again.

Firstly, the Roadways around the perimeter of the Capital and any suburbs you have Roadways which have trees growing almost up to the roadways, well these for a start have to be cleared and poisoned to prevent regrowth, the grass areas have to be slashed down to No More than 100 millimetres in height and kept slashed to maintain this grass at this level. This may seem a drastic measure to take but it will enhance the appearance of the whole area plus ensure that Wild Fires will never again cause damage again as you all experienced early this year. This slashing will have to be done to a width of NO LESS than 200 hundred metres in width and in the middle of this slashed area a pipeline with an inside diameter of 250 millimetres should be set in a trench some 450 millimetres deep. At intervals of no more than 18 metres provision should be made to install an upright pipe 25 millimetres inside diameter and 1050 millimetres long to which a tap can be fitted below an impact sprinkler with a 4 millimetre size hole on the sprinkler outlet to enable this unit to cover the full 18 metre area / diameter area. The fitting of a tap to every sprinkler riser is necessary so as whenever a fire develops it allows the Fire Officers the ability to turn on only the sprinklers necessary to protect the threatened areas, No Wet Grass burns especially if the ground is also wet.

This main Pipeline could be connected to the outlet pipe or evaporation ponds of the Sewerage System this water could be used cheaply and very effectively to beautify the surrounding areas around roadways being kept green year round and slashed, the cut grass could be made into hay and sold off to farmers at a reasonable cost to help recover some of the costs involved with the installation of the water mains and sprinkler system and the mowing / slashing costs. The benefit of using the treated sewerage water would ensure that the sewerage ponds were never at risk of overflowing and disposing of excess sewerage water can become a problem to contend with when this problem arises but by pumping it out onto slashed grass areas will serve a dual purpose and prevent any more uncontrollable fires as you people have had first hand experience with earlier this year. From seeing the film footage on T.V. coverage of the fires I was amazed that this fire protection sprinkler system had not been installed years ago or was it the common old belief that this will never happen to us, and when it threatened there was plenty of time with the Armed services to have been called in to clear the grass and trees away long before the fire was on the doorsteps of homes.

I would like to be the person in charge of the Fire Service down in your area, because there were many errors made regarding early action being put in place days before the full force of the fires were a threat directly to homes, there needs to be some charges of incompetence laid against the respective officers concerned as they are NOT experienced enough to be in charge of the fire service. I'm some 4,500 kilometres away and with the regular forecasts issued by the weather bureau every hour at least they had plenty of time to put protective measures in place, we got them via both television and radio and emergency services have priority to weather every 30 minutes if required during such emergencies. Heads need to be rolled and quite a few burns need to be taken off seats which are only keeping seats warm not of use for anything more because there is a lot of expertise lacking here and costing big money every year to keep the seats warm.

With regards to Fire Access Roads I cannot put it clearer than to tell you that these National Parks need not One but Many Access Roads and they need to be substantial in width and kept maintained year round, there is NO POINT in having a National Park if you are not prepared to construct proper access roads and these need to be running both North to South and East to West and no further than 2 kilometres apart or put plainly 4 square kilometre blocks.

Fire Breaks in your country should never be less than 150 metres wide clear felled and timber cut up and sold for firewood to warm homes, this would also help to cover some of the construction costs involved in putting Fire Breaks in place, please note that the Road Surface should be maintained graded clean for a minimum width of 30 metres with grass kept slashed for 60 metres either side of the Road Edges. Yes I can hear your cries from here already about the cost but to have a National Park so close to populated areas without fit and proper fire protection constructed is absolute stupidity, why have something if you cannot protect it fully or risking people's lives trying to save something where no provision has been made to have proper access roads and fire breaks built. These National Parks here in Australia are time bombs waiting for the right conditions to explode and create chaos all over again, the National Parks down in your areas need to be grazed continuously to keep the build up of excess fuel from becoming a major hazard again. I have seen it before and will see it happen again if you people in charge of these places don't learn to work with nature and NOT against it, to graze stock in confined or controlled areas will do nothing but good for the grasses and herbage within these parks. With regards to grazing stock I don't mean to flog the country bare but to eat it down and then move them to an adjoining area by grazing these areas year round then it is like going around pruning the grasses and herbage which will only stimulate growth not kill it out. I wish I was living down there or able to fly down to Canberra and address these people given the responsibility of caring for this land and controlling fires both within the National Parks and surrounding areas where so many people lost all their possessions and their homes as well through the ignorance of the Fire Authorities for these areas. No-one can control fires if they cannot get close access to the fire fronts, the next very important thing you must all remember that Fire Hydrants must be more readily available and closer together because the volume of water carried on these small tenders is insufficient to do much more than protect these Fire Tenders let alone extinguish fire fronts. The people who fought these fires did a marvellous job with what they had to work with, one point you must ALL take on board is that BIG Water Tankers have to be filled and put right up near the source of the fire front so that these small tenders don't have big lead times to access a fire hydrant and fill up their tanks and get back again to the fire by which time they were away the fire has simply raced away unchecked.

I have had years of experience with fires throughout the N.T. where some Fire Fronts were up to 150 kilometres long but with careful monitoring and installing fire breaks ahead of the fires with graders and bull dozers and having fire fighting units available to go down graded breaks we were able to get full control of the fires quite quickly. I realise that our country is different to yours but knowing your country and taking the appropriate measures for the respective country then disasters can be avoided or considerably reduced and smaller areas damaged. It must be noted and acted upon that if you have something worth saving then you have to spend money to build in access roads and ensure that timber is cleared from roadways & removed and the grasses kept slashed or strip grazed which would cost the Government NOTHING to put in place, grazing being the best and cheapest means of ensuring fire breaks are kept in good condition.

In many places when the fires were raging down your way there were few maintained road surfaces and NO loaded fire tender can traverse rough surfaces quickly hence you are fighting a losing battle from the start if you have poor road surfaces and no wide clear fire breaks in place and without Fire Hydrants at regular intervals and no big capacity water tankers readily available in big numbers close by the fire front then you are wasting your time and resources, risking lives unnecessarily and damaging Fire Tenders or having them destroyed because they had no escape areas.

Escape areas are clear areas of land no less than 50 metres square and these serve many purposes, one bulk watertankers can congregate there, control stations also can be set up in such places and should fire tenders need to bolt from a hazardous situation then they can retreat to such safety areas and reload with water from big tankers to protect their units and the Firemen's lives as well. I'm 62 years old and have spent my whole life directly and indirectly on the land, have seen and fought some very big fires in my time and proudly say have never lost a fire tender nor a life of a fire fighter and when I first started fighting fires we had no tenders and did it the hard way with flails, wet bags or branches from trees and flogged these fires manually, thank God for the people who developed pumps which could be adapted to motors and fitted to a water tank to allow water to be sprayed on to fires to bring them under control in less time and not having to go back and mop-up burning timber lying on the ground.

I have included diagrams of Fire Breaks with Roadways, Escape Pads / Safety Pads and the Irrigation System to be installed around the Capital and surrounding areas or any town or city with sewerage systems in place and using evaporation Ponds to dispose of effluent water. Don't waste this water use it to enhance the beauty of any town or city by pumping it out onto fire breaks and the grasses kept mown or slashed, cut grass can be made into hay as I mentioned earlier in my letter to you. As a pensioner now I don't have the resources to travel down to Canberra but would be only too pleased to talk in depth with you about any concerns you may have with controlling fires or how to prevent them from becoming a major threat to populated areas and destroying homes and farms.

I must say that reducing management of fire breaks and roads is ridiculous, look at the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service last year they reduced their activity and management of land under their control to half a percent of it's management area, these people are not responsible to hold such positions and anyone who is burnt out through their actions should recompensed 100% for their losses.

Some of the farmers / graziers who lost everything shown on National T.V. news services were the victims of Government not having proper protection in place year round they couldn't even grade Fire Breaks around the homesteads before the fire took over and simply wiped them out completely. I ask what sort of Fire Service Department do these people run?, from what I saw on the T.V. News service there was a TOTAL lack of experience plus had weather conditions combined which caused so much damage and loss of life to both humans and livestock plus native wildlife. There are a lot of people who should be prosecuted for allowing this sort of damage to occur because of their incompetence and lack of experience in dealing with situations like this massive fire early this year.

The Herald Sun had a good write up by Mr. Wilson Tuckey, Federal Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government in response to a Mr. Gavan McFadzean who wrote some of the most useless rubbish I have ever witnessed in print, his experience is zero in land management and the ecology of plants and trees.

If the Government wants to tie up land for National Parks then they should be prepared to not only protect their property against wild fires but ensure that any fire which is in a National Park and gets away then they should be held responsible for their actions and not having fire breaks of suitable sizes to control fires and protect the properties which adjoin these National Parks and get burnt out the Government should recompense the people affected by their negligence.

I'm prepared to help or advise your department in any way at any-time should you need it in putting together a proper fire management program and protective services in place. Have you or anyone within your department ever had discussions with the Armed Services about getting their servicemen to grade fire breaks and clear timber from land to enable wide fire breaks to be established. Work such as this something which I'm sure could be undertaken by the services for the benefit of the public who could be at risk when the next fire gets out of control. Training such as this would benefit both the public and the Government as well, training such as this would be of major benefit to the Armed Services as they would have first hand experience on such a construction and would serve them vital experience plus should they ever be required to fight fires in the areas which they constructed fire breaks they would be fully familiar with the area.

Please note that to reduce erosion where roads have been graded within fire breaks they should be Flat Graded to minimise the risk of erosion though no doubt in some places it will be necessary to build fire roads up above the surrounding area to get maximum benefit from the roadworks. All road crossings over gullies, creeks or rivers should have gentle slope access to and from the water course so that no damage occurs to fire tenders having to cross these water courses.

I must point out that I'm not a tree hugger/greener nor do I support rambo style clearing as such but recognise the value of having proper access roads to allow fire fighters the ability to get to the fire fronts quickly without damage being done to their vehicles or themselves. I'm not a drinker of alcohol so what I tell you is from sheer experience on the land working with fires and also having been in charge of Emergency Services in Alice Springs during 1973 & 74 where I was able to put my experience to good use for the benefit of the public there. I don't speak from a alcohol soaked brain nor saturated with drugs either and offer my advice to you for the benefit of everyone concerned to make fire fighting safer and more effective than what it was earlier this year in and around Canberra. I have 2 mobile phone numbers available 24 hours a day should you require any further advice regarding anything which I have written to you or which you may wish to discuss further with me regarding fire fighting or control of fires as I would be only too pleased to help you or your department in any way free of charge.

Yours Faithfully

Peter L. Brumby.

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P.S. The Escape /Safety areas to which I refer can also double as emergency landing areas for helicopters in an emergency situation with the helicopter or to get injured personal out of the area for treatment at a hospital, these are very useful should fire tenders have to retreat from a fire front in a hurry. On one of these pads they can protect themselves and machines easily thus reducing the huge costs involved in replacing one or more of these units, when you think about it these pads are multi-functional and are a blessing in emergency situations. In all the footage I saw on T.V. News coverage there was nowhere for a helicopter to land during the fires you experienced early this year and there is no excuse for situations like this to be. I would also like to mention that ALL Fire Tenders should have Fire Retardant Tanks fitted to them so they can spray retardant over the fire tender in emergency situations where the tender is at risk of being destroyed by fire, it would save both vehicle and fire fighters lives too. Hopefully this situation never arises anywhere but if these units were fitted with fire retardant tanks then the risk is greatly reduced of losing men and machine too.

*Peter L. Brumby*

Dear Sirs / Madam,

I have quickly drawn up some diagrams regarding Fire Breaks along Roadways around the perimeter areas of cities and towns, Fire Breaks throughout your National Parks with the recommended Safety Pads which should be kept clean graded ALL Year round. These Safety Pads serve many purposes both during fires or other emergencies which can occur at anytime and should a helicopter need to land then any of these safety pads close by the emergency area can be used to land on, during fires these pads can be used to hold loaded water tankers ready to fill small fire tenders quickly and close by the fire front. A communications centre can also be set up on any one of these pads close to the fire front but out of harms way, should any fire tenders have to retreat from the fire front then being able to get to a Safety or Escape Pad then both men and machine can be safe from being burnt. This has happened before and with careful planning initially then these sort of losses can be avoided in future, no-one can afford to lose man and machine or either of these vital items.

Fire Breaks along perimeter roads should have Fire Hydrants just off the roadway and have a 100 millimeter Minimum Inside diameter overhead stand pipe to fill Water Tankers or Fire Tenders quickly in times of crisis, time lost in getting refilled quickly is time wasted and can never be caught up plus whilst a tender is away getting refilled then the fire is going unchecked.

I must advise you that during ANY FIRE EMERGENCY it is critical that you have a bulldozer and graders available to clear and cut access roads into the fire front at Night as all fires decrease in intensity during the night and this is where machines clearing and grading fire access tracks are most effective plus these machines can save one hell of a lot water, money and time in controlling fires. Vision is reduced only very slightly but the actual fire gives off a lot of light plus with modern machines lighting systems are more than sufficient to give optimum vision. Machines work better at night as they get more oxygen for their motors and less risk of stopping because of low oxygen levels for their motors, this is the biggest risk using machines close to fire fronts during the day time, I have personally witnessed 2 machines burn because of loss of oxygen and stop running and get caught in the fire plus the operators lacked experience with using graders too close to the fire front, I personally recommend that NO machine goes closer than 40 metres from the actual fire front and be ready to get away quickly immediately the operators hear any sort of loss of engine speed when working close to fire fronts.

My last big fire which I fought by myself with 1 Caterpillar Grader with 14 foot blade had a front of 40 kilometres and I worked for 40 hours non stop except to refuel every 12 hours, I achieved so much more control during the night and in many places was able to direct soil directly onto the flame front and extinguish the fire completely with fire units only having to attend to smaller areas where I could not get with the big grader of mine. My total costs of travel some 65 kilometres to the fire plus 40 hours work plus travel home again cost \$5,200.00., no stock were lost nor fencing was damaged because I had full control of where I wanted fire units to come in to back me up and being right at the flame front I was able to advise others what they needed to do because the water refill points were quite some kilometres away from the fire front and to save valuable time and water the fire units were used minimally, fuel consumption was drastically reduced because I could relay information by radio back to all tenders (3) of every few minutes thus reducing a lot of unnecessarily running of fire units. Fire control and management are one of my real loves, the challenge of being able to work with nature instead of against it is rewarding and very interesting, I only wish that during your big fires early this year that I was able to be there with you people physically because I could have saved you so much time and money in controlling these fires.

Another point that I must raise with you is about the installation of wide fire breaks at the foot of the cliff faces where people have built on the top of these cliffs, here is one point where you Need 2 fire breaks graded 30 feet/ 9 metres wide each and must be 200 metres apart so that controlled burns can be carried out between both these fire breaks and these should never be started before 3pm during daylight hours. The reason for this is because the intensity of this burning is reduced later in the afternoon towards evening because the air cools down and the moisture rises towards the ground surface which brings moisture into the grasses which reduces the intensity of the fire but gives a very cool and effective clean burn. In your area these burns may have to be carried out twice a year to give 100% protection from runaway or wildfires from causing damage to homes or people and animals. The Greenies will no doubt raise their voices but when they see how little damage is done by cool controlled burns then they will come over to your side in the end, I would not tolerate the crap they dish out and continually get media coverage yet what they spout is a load of rubbish mostly anyway and has NO relevance to the situation you are dealing with.

I have a small property of 800 square kilometres on the Sturt Plateau and each and every paddock is fire broken around the perimeter to a width of 90 feet 27 metres and then diagonally fire broken across every paddock so in case a fire does start then it can only burn one quarter out at the maximum before I get machines and fire units on site. I must add that all my road surfaces and fire breaks can be travelled at 80 kilometers by any loaded vehicle or higher when unladen, good roads are absolutely essential when fighting fires, all my bore water points are equipped with overhead fire hydrants and I have escape pads along every road but so far we have never had to use them once. All my vehicles and machines are radio equipped and have both selcall and open full coverage call system which allows every one to hear each call made from one vehicle or the base radio.

Every water point has a 32,000 gallon tank at each bore and during any emergency like fire all bores are started and left running to ensure that all water points are full to overflowing in case they have to be pumped from to fill tankers/ fire fighting units, we also have one 40,000 litre bulk tanker which is taken down close to where the fire front is close by allowing fire units to fill from this tanker 80 times before we have to refill it, our fire units only carry 500 litres of water except the bigger truck which has 15,000 litres capacity tank and bigger fire fighting pump system to the other smaller units. I vowed that I would never get caught short when it comes to fighting fires and so far we have never had anything but praise from other property owners and the Rural Fire Service with the quality equipment we have available and can load three small units on to vehicles and have them filled and away within 15 minutes to where they required, the bigger tanker takes about 30 minutes to load and fill and get away first up I get the location and send the grader operator to the fire immediately, this machine is kept ready 24 hours a day and 7 days a week as are the 4 wheel drives and trucks full of fuel and checked ready to go at any time for at least 8 hours running before refuelling. The big bulk tanker takes 40 minutes to fill at present but I am going to redesign our Fire Water Pad and fit a bigger capacity pump to a multi outlet manifold where 4 units can fill at once and the big bulk tanker can fill after the others have filled and left for the fire area, being a semitrailer unit it can travel quite quickly once loaded. I maintain that good roads and fire breaks kept well maintained year round and equipment ready to be loaded onto vehicles and filled within a few minutes is essential to getting quick control of fires, all equipment such as the grader and dozer are kept in top order and ready to go as soon as the key to start them is turned, the dozer is driven onto the low loader and taken down to wherever it may be needed which can be away within 15 minutes of being notified about a fire be it on my place or a neighbours property.

I've never been beaten by any fire yet and have never had to leave a fire because I never had the right equipment to fight with, hopefully I will never be beaten but working with nature, the wind and temperature I can get the better end of the stick regarding fire very quickly but I'm slowing down a bit physically myself but have a good crew of staff and with neighbours staff work well as team in an emergency, my 62 years are starting to tell some parts of my body to slow down and this annoys me not being as quick as I used to be.

I look forward to hearing from you should you need any further advice regarding the protection of property and installation of fire breaks to be the most effective and reduce damage or loss of homes or other property, I may come across as very rough in my ways of getting my message across but really mean NO offence by how I explain myself and just what is needed to control fires even with bad weather conditions like you experienced earlier this year. I would have handled the situation but I wasn't there but could see some deficiencies initially and some errors made during the whole exercise but as you never had fire breaks in place as there should have been and graded roads to get into fire hot spots made the harder for everyone concerned to work with. The use of sewerage effluent to irrigate along the boundary roads /fire breaks along with slashed or mown grass to the width which I stated will not only beautify the area but ensure another wildfire doesn't cause another damage bill like the last fire you had early this year. All trees must be removed from ALL fire breaks otherwise you defeat the purpose of putting in fire breaks in the first place especially where there are strong winds involved with the fires. All trees will burn quickly and create further fires if you get strong winds and big fuel loads, the best and cheapest way to control excess fuel loads and that is to use farmers and graziers to put stock into areas controlled with electric fences to keep them in the respective areas where they are put initially, the use of stock be they cattle or sheep or both they spread seed over land which may not have seed or grass presently growing. National Parks too should be grazed year round to control grass and weeds from getting out of control and building up excessive fuel loads which do nothing but damage to the country especially during the fire season and everyone suffers because of this ignorance of a few people in power who don't understand nature and the need for a good coverage of feed and being overgrown and wasting on the ground and being a fire risk not being easy to control when fire does take hold. Feed it out and control the growth with stock and reduce your fire risk dramatically and it costs you nothing as the farmers and graziers have the responsibility to care for their stock and fence them in. The Bullshit about the erosion that stock cause does not occur if the areas are not over grazed, the stock will reduce your maintenance costs considerably in the parks and along the fire breaks by grazing them. After the wet season we get some paddocks which respond very quickly and produce vast numbers of new grass plants and if we don't graze them heavily for a few weeks in these paddocks then many grass plants will die because the growth density is too much to grow properly and many plants never reach maturity to seed so go to waste, so we stock these paddocks very heavily and get great daily growth rate for a few weeks and then reduce the number of stock to allow normal growth of grass and herbage. This may mean that we monitor the paddocks more closely for the year but we never have food shortages in any paddock and get the best dollars per kilogram for our stock when sold and we don't have to hold our stock for 2 years before we sell them, 13-15 months they are market ready.

Too much grass is detrimental to the land so we have to really watch what is going on after rains.

I can proudly say that we have never been affected by drought nor had to reduce our carrying capacity of stock because we had insufficient grass to carry through the year, in fact we could carry our full complement of stock for 2 years without a normal wet season as we have multiple water points in every paddock which reduces the risk of stock walking down feed to go to water points they feed out from water into the paddocks for extra feed. Next year we are going to go into intensive production breeding of cattle and with the amount of excess feed left before the wet season at present won't be a problem any more because extra stock will keep the feed situation more manageable and reduce the need to move extra stock into paddocks which will overgrow if not kept in check will not be necessary.

I hope that you take note of what information I have given to you so that you never have another repeat of this years fire problems, if you take note of what I have told you about the ways and sizes regarding widths of roads and firebreaks then you will never have problems controlling any fires which may start. Access to any fire is critical and the easier and quicker you can get equipment into place the easier it is to control any fire, the safety pads are another important thing to have in place being so universal they are a blessing in disguise when a fire starts. They are great for mustering points for firemen and equipment, radio communications point and somewhere safe for bulk water tankers to muster and be able to save so much valuable time in refilling fire tenders close by the fire area making them more effective when they don't have to travel far to refill with water, fuel tankers could also be kept there to refuel fire tenders should they need to refuel. Overall to be a winner then you have to have everything on hand ready to use when required not have to travel many kilometres to get fuel or water, emergency services could also set up food preparation vans on these Safety-Escape pads too hard working people need regular food being given to keep up the energy expended during fire fighting, it is terribly demanding and taxing on the human body. I'm willing to help you in any way I can should you need further advice but would never go down there during your winter as the cold would cripple me properly and permanently, during your summer would be the best for my health.

If you follow my advice then you will never be beaten by any fire again, I wish you every success in what you do but don't waste any time in implementing the start of your fire protection measures which I have mentioned for your benefit, give 100% of your power and put in the irrigation system and hydrants along the outermost roadways around your city and suburbs, it will serve two purposes by reducing your fire risks plus it will also save time in reducing the level of effluent in evaporation ponds in the sewerage system thus reducing the fly problem too. The grass grown on this irrigated area can be cut and baled into hay and sold to farmers for stock. The cutting and baling could be let out to tender thus reducing your costs further, think about it, a public fire break earning money and costing your government or fire service anything dollarwise other than the initial cost of installation. I wish you every best wish both for now and the future in your fire management as I have suggested.

Yours Faithfully

Peter L. Brumby.

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