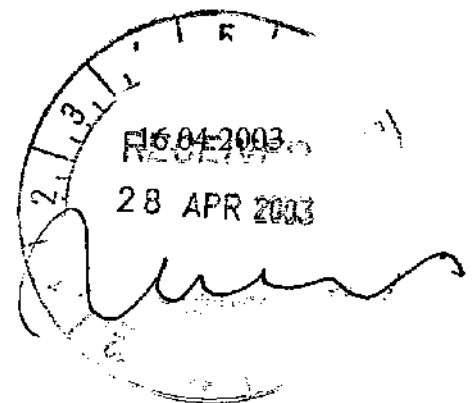


Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Sir,

I submit the following submission for consideration by your committee and I would be prepared to meet and discuss the issues with the committee.

My full name is George Ross Dobbys, B.Sc.(For.) Sydney, Dip. For. Canberra 1950

I was employed by the Forestry Commission of NSW from 1951 to 1986. From 1970 to 1986 I was Regional Forester in charge of the South East Forestry Region, based in Eden. The region covered Eden, Bega, Bombala and Cooma districts.

During the full period of my employment with the NSW Forestry Commission I was involved in Fire Management and Control in the areas under my control. In the later years this involved working and co-operating with adjoining landholders, private and government, and developing close liaison with all other Fire Control organisations.

During the period in Eden I was the section 41F Emergency Controller on five (5) occasions - 1972/73, twice in 1980 (simultaneously) 1983, and 1985. The fires in the Eden region 1972/73 to 1983 were in forested lands while the 1985 fire was mainly on grazing land with some open forest.

The fires in the Eden district 1972/73, 1980 and 1983 clearly demonstrated the value of hazard reduction, provision of access and improved equipment and techniques in reducing the damage to the environment and facilitating faster control of wildfires.

In December 1972, 13 fires were started by lightning during two (2) periods of dry storms. Eight (8) of these fires were controlled in less than forty (40) hectares mainly due to good access and quick response.

Of the remaining five (5), one was controlled within 24 hours as there was reasonable access right around the fire and in front of the fire there was a large area that had been hazard reduced the previous winter.

The other four (4) fires developed into major fires, mainly due to lack of access and lack of equipment. Prior to the fires, during winter, there had been attempts at large scale hazard

reduction with very poor results in most cases so there were heavy fuel loads building up the intensity of the fires.

Control was effected by building roads around the fires and back-burning at night, averaging approximately eight (8) kilometres per twenty four (24) hours. Backburning was by hand except for a large area on Mt. Imlay where roading was impossible and this was burnt by aerial ignition one evening.

In 1980 there was increased access in the State Forest due to roading for logging, but minimal access in the National Parks. However, there were very heavy fuel loads in State Forests due to logging debris. The National Park had not had any fuel reduction for ten (10) years, except for an area around Womboyn village. There was early detection, and the first crew was at the fire within fifteen (15) minutes with men and water. There were very high temperatures, over 40 degrees Centigrade, with strong north west winds and very low humidity. The crews could not stop the fire. The fire was very hot, with excessive damage. Control was eventually effected with a large number of plant and equipment and an experienced workforce.

By 1983 the changes in management of the forest operations, improved techniques and equipment and a greater understanding of fuel conditions enabled a much easier and faster control plus a reduction in fire intensity and damage.

The change in management was to reduce the size of the logging coupes to the smallest possible size and to only log each alternate coupe. This was at a cost as the rate of road construction had to be doubled and the logging contractor only got half the area to log so his costs were increased as well.

With a better understanding of the fuel/moisture differential between logged and unlogged areas, logging slash could be burnt without any fire entering unlogged areas.

The 1983 fire that burnt in Victoria from Combiobar to Mallacoota was controlled as soon as it entered this alternate coupe area.

The post logging burns have benefits exceeding the period of fuel build up to heavy dangerous levels. Regeneration follows logging and fuel builds as seedlings and saplings grow. Areas that were post logging hazard reduced can be hazard reduced at a younger age and smaller size as there will be less fuel on the ground.

Efficient fire control requires the following:

1. A FIRE PLAN that covers all land tenures, all land owners and managers, all organisations with fire control obligations and capabilities. No one can stand alone.

The PLAN should include off season hazard reduction, maintenance of roads and trails, traffic management, evacuation of persons not able to look after themselves, with designated refuge centres.


2. The best possible WEATHER FORECASTING both before and during any fires.

3. EARLY DETECTION of all fires. Full time surveillance for all periods of high fire danger - not just an occasional flight in an aeroplane. Detection and reporting must include accurate location of the fire.
4. EARLY ATTACK. This needs varying degrees of readiness, depending on current and forecast weather conditions and fuel loads.
5. ADEQUATE ACCESS. An early attack cannot be mounted if fire fighters have to walk eight (8) kilometres to the fire. Also four-wheel drive trails are very slow, particularly if they are not adequately maintained.
6. FUEL MANAGEMENT. Fuel should be maintained at a level where damage is kept low and keeps fire intensity down, facilitating quicker control.
7. EQUIPMENT AND MANPOWER. Resources must be organised prior to the fire season. Fire equipment need types, numbers, location, transport, hire rates and fuel supplies. Manpower - keep to experienced and trained persons with numbers, location, transport, known skills, and control structure. Meals and accommodation must be planned.

In all the fires listed above, volunteers played a major role in the control of the fires. They came from all the local brigades, brigades from adjoining areas and the outskirts of Sydney. Local brigades also assisted in planning and carrying out hazard reduction.

I trust that these observations and suggestions will ensure that bushfire control in the future will be adequately planned and resourced.

Yours faithfully,



G.R. Dobbys.