



SUBMISSION TO COMMONWEALTH INQUIRY INTO BUSHFIRES

My experience with bushfires goes back to 1959 when I joined the Forests Department in Western Australia. I was one of the fire fighters in Dwellingup when it was burnt out by the bushfire of Tuesday 24 January 1961.

Air photos of the area burnt (about 150 000 hectares) were taken soon after and I was in charge of the team that interpreted the fire damage. We found, after field checking the air photo interpretation, that much less damage was done in areas that had been previously prescribed burned.

This same observation, that areas that have had their fuel reduced by prescribed burning under mild conditions are easier to control and suffer much less damage in a bushfire under intense conditions than areas with no fuel reduction, has been made many times over many subsequent years by field staff and scientists working in fire management.

Therefore I would ask the committee to take on board the clear message that an adequate program of prescribed burning must be reinstated in the forest areas of Australia.

If the forest around Canberra had been adequately prescribed burned it is unlikely that the bushfires of January 2003 would have been so intense – there would have been less fuel to thrive on – and so the damage would have been much less. It is likely that there would have been no houses burned and no deaths. A similar story applies to other areas burned this summer in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia.

As part of a reinvigorated program of prescribed burning in forest areas Australia wide **there must be adequate and independent monitoring and auditing of the actual program against the agreed program in both quality and extent.**

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