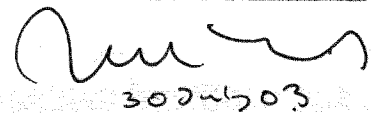


NILLUMBIK
RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION


30 July 03



PO Box 451, Diamond Creek. 3089 Ph. 0412 187 697 Fax: 9438 2330 Inc. No. A0037059A

Submission No.486

25th July 03,

**House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires.**

The Nillumbik Ratepayers Association would like to thank the Committee for allowing our group to present this late submission and submit two expert reports by Mr Rod Incoll and Mr David Packham as evidence.

We would like to amplify on an earlier verbal submission by Ms. Mary McDonald at Wodonga on Thursday 24th July 2003.

As well as being officially recognised as **one of the most fire prone areas in the world, the zones, overlays and local laws in our Melbourne metropolitan Shire ensure we will burn.** Some overlays and planning provisions contradict these restrictions but the council chooses to **enforce those that protect plants rather than people or property.**

Nillumbik is in southeast Victoria where hot dry winds blowing from the central desert, low humidity and El Nino droughts create the circumstances for fire. We are surrounded in the northwest, north and east with **State and National parks (10% of the Shire.)** The boundaries of the rest and spine of the shire are **rivers with 60 metres riparian areas protected by Environmental Significance Overlays. (ESO's)** 80% of the shire is rural, with a small farming zone in the northwest. The rest is an **Environmental Rural Zone** – mainly rural residential with properties from 1 – 40 hectares. **67% of the Shire is covered by an ESO protecting dry sclerophyll bush,** ecologically programmed to cause fires which ensure its survival and from which it regenerates.

The southern 10% **urban area** has 3 zones, Residential, Township and Low Density Residential. This area is also **covered with native vegetation with embedded houses.** Council tried to enact a planning scheme amendment (C12) to ensure that any new housing had 5-20 canopy gums on ¼ acre sites, bush “look a like” front gardens all hiding the house. Council will ensure that vegetation mimicking bush will be planted on **council owned nature strips / road reserves. A Significant Landscape Overlay** over suburbia would ensure no tree – exotic or native, was removed without a permit.

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Date: _____

WILLMURRIK KATAPAYERS ASSOCIATION



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25th July 03

House of Representatives Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires

The Willmurrik Katapayers Association would like to thank the Committee for allowing our group to present this late submission and submit two expert reports by Mr Rod Jacob and Mr David Packman as evidence.

We would like to amplify on an earlier verbal submission by Mrs. Mary McDonald at Wodonga on Thursday 24th July 2003.

As well as being officially recognized as one of the most fire prone areas in the world, the zones, overlays and local laws in our Melbourne metropolitan Shire ensure we will burn. Some overlays and planning provisions contradict these restrictions but the council chooses to enforce those that protect plants rather than people or property.

Willmurrik is in southeast Victoria where hot dry winds blowing from the coastal basin, low humidity and El Niño droughts create the circumstances for fire. We are surrounded in the northwest, north and east with State and National parks (10% of the Shire). The boundaries of the rest and spine of the shire are rivers with 60 metres riparian areas protected by Environmental Significance Overlays (ESO's). 80% of the shire is rural, with a small farming zone in the northwest. The rest is an Environmental Rural Zone - mainly rural residential with properties from 1 - 40 hectares. 47% of the shire is covered by an ESO protecting dry sclerophyll bush, ecologically programmed to cause fires which ensure its survival and from which it regenerates.

The southern 10% urban area has 3 zones, Residential, Township and Low Density Residential. This area is also covered with native vegetation with embedded houses. Council tried to ease a planning scheme amendment (C15) to cause the any new housing had 7-20 canopy gums on 1/2 acre sites, bush "look a like" front gardens all behind the house. Council will ensure that vegetation mounding bush will be planted on council owned water strips / road reserves. A significant Landscape Overlay over suburbs would ensure no tree - exotic or native, was removed without a permit.

After evaluation, the independent panel that reviewed the projected amendment recommended, "C12 be abandoned" but our council officers are so bloody-minded they are determined to push through a slightly altered C12.

The shire is a maze of **Significant Roadsides** protected by Local Law 5 whereby no trees, bushes or ground fuel can be removed without a permit. These protected roadsides extend into low-density Residential urban areas, which are also covered by an overlay combining **Bushfire Prone areas and Wildfire Management Overlays**. (WMO'S)

Most of the Significant Roadsides are a maze of **Major and Minor firebreaks** where undergrowth should be slashed each year, we have one statutory **Fire Protection Officer** to monitor a shire of 435 square kilometres.

Mapping Faults

Current Nillumbik Council maps define Kinglake National Park as a **refuge area**. In the event of a major fire an Incident Controller without local knowledge, could direct fire fighters and residents to the "safety" of the "refuge" area. People directed here would be incinerated. In our view this map should **not** be relied on. (Current map (Shire of Nillumbik Fire Prevention Mapping Map2 edition October 1997.)

After evaluation, the independent panel that reviewed the project memorandum recommended "C12 be abandoned" but our council officers are so bloody-minded they are determined to push through a slightly altered C12.

The site is a maze of significant Roadside protected by Local Law 2 whereby no work, fences or ground can be removed without a permit. These protected roadides extend into low-density Residential urban areas which are also covered by an overlay combining Roadside Front yards and Wildlife Management Overlay (W102).

Most of the significant Roadside are a maze of Major and Minor Streets where underground should be started each year, we have one statutory Fire Protection Officer to monitor a line of 435 square kilometers.

Mapping Issues

Current National Council maps define Roadside National Park as a refuge area. In the event of a major fire an Incident Commander without local knowledge could direct fire fighters and residents to the "refuge" area. People directed here would be incinerated. In our view this map should not be used on a current map (State of Oklahoma Fire Prevention Mapping Map3 edition October 1997).

Recommendations

Review all fire related maps of Nillumbik as a matter of urgency.

Reduce fine fuels in Nillumbik to a maximum safe level of less than 10 tonnes per hectare now, including State and National Parks, all Council land, roadsides and private land to the maximum safe level recommended by the CFA.

Cropping and grazing should be "as of right" in the Environmental Rural Zone and not require a permit or be banned in the Christmas Hills area, which is currently the case. This will ensure scrub and ground fuel will not become a fire hazard.

The Wildfire Management Overlay / Bushfire Prone Areas should override all other provisions in the planning scheme.

The Victorian Planning provision clause 52.17 should override all other provisions in the absence of a Wildfire Management Overlay, when it should be prioritised second.

If Nillumbik Council's "Environmental Weed list" is ever legalised, an overlay, etc should not prevent their removal.

Major and Minor Firebreak Roadsides should be cleared as required or the concept be abandoned.

There should be no Significant Landscape Overlays on suburban streetscapes.

There should be a significant cleared firebreak/ buffer zone between National/State/NRE parks and the rest of the shire made on public land.

A fuel-reduced buffer zone should be required around the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), which separates suburbia from the Green Wedge.

Residents should not be required to surround their houses with flammable fire flora.

All nature strips within the UGB despite their status should be cleared of ground fuel by the public ownership authority – the Nillumbik Council.

Publish all CFA "no go" areas so affected residents may be prepared by fireguard groups and resident phone trees.

If the State Government can find \$250 million to fund fire fighting and help for affected residents then they should increase the budget for fire prevention – eg. More fuel reduction burns.

Recommendations

Review all fire related maps of Wiltshire as a matter of urgency.

Reduce fire risks in Wiltshire to a maximum safe level of less than 10 tonnes per hectare now, including State and National Parks, all Council land, roadsides and private land to the maximum safe level recommended by the CFA.

Clipping and grazing should be "as of right" in the Environmental Rural Zone and not require a permit or be banned in the Christmas Hills area, which is currently the case. This will ensure scrub and ground fuel will not become a fire hazard.

The Wildlife Management Overlay: Bushfire Prone Areas should override all other provisions in the planning scheme.

The Victorian Planning provision clause 52.17 should override all other provisions in the absence of a Wildlife Management Overlay, when it should be provided second.

Wiltshire Council's "Environmental Wood fuel" is ever leafless, an overlay, etc should not prevent their removal.

Major and Minor Firebreak Roadside should be cleared as required in the concept be abandoned.

There should be no Significant Landscape Overlays on suburban streetscapes.

There should be a significant cleared firebreak buffer zone between National State/NRFB parks and the rest of the site made on public land.

A fuel-reduced buffer zone should be required around the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), which separates suburbs from the Green Wedge.

Residents should not be required to surround their houses with flammable fire fuel.

All nature strips within the UGB despite their status should be cleared of ground fuel by the public ownership authority - the Wiltshire Council.

Provide all CFA "no go" areas so affected residents may be prepared by fireguard panels and resident phone trees.

If the State Government can find £250 million to fund fire fighting and help for affected residents then they should increase the budget for fire prevention - eg. more fuel reduction burns.