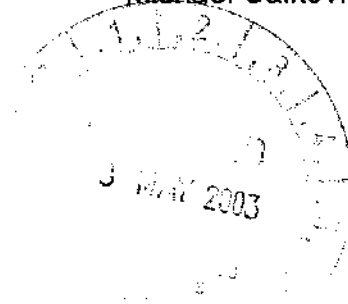


Michael Calkovics

Michael Calkovics (Dip. App. Sc.)



House of Representatives
Select Committee
Recent Australian Bushfire Inquiry

Dear Committee,

Please find enclosed my submission regarding the January 18 Canberra bushfires:

I am writing to you regarding the January 18 Bushfires. I have some facts and opinions that I strongly believe is highly relevant to your, and any other, inquiries.

I am most concerned about a very serious situation where 'Canberra was deliberately allowed to burn' with a resultant loss of life and property.

You may ask why am I raising this serious allegation?

Firstly, it has come to my attention via 'Sky News' (20th January 2003?) that the Bureau of Meteorology were upset that the urgent faxes sent to various media bodies warning of an imminent Fire Storm event wasn't acted upon (to warn the populace).

Apparently even when houses in Duffy were already burning a journalist from a Canberra radio station was told to shut up and to let it burn and the radio station didn't announce his story etc. (Information to that effect supplied by Andrew from Unit 7 Havelock House Canberra.)

From my personal experiences with the media, firestorms such as this one makes good front page stories with the resultant fund raising, feel sorry stuff and promoting many charities, resulting in record advertising and sales for papers like 'The Canberra Times'.

If true, then does this malicious and calculated act by the media amount to criminal conduct in the resultant loss of life and property? Again if true, will any criminal charges be laid?

It is also important to note that I for one was already warning my friends and family living in Woden, Weston Creek, Kambah and Wanniasa many days before the event to prepare themselves and yes many did listen to me.

I would also like to give my reasonable expert opinions regarding the January 18 firestorm.

I was formally employed at the C.S.I.R.O Division of Plant Industry for Dr Malcolm Gill in regards to fire ecology upon native forests in the Brindabella Ranges. In my opinion many forests can only now regenerate from seedlings alone, as the severity of the fires would of killed many fire sensitive species. These will need looking after, without any fires for decades, until they flower or seed or we will lose them.

I am also regarded as an expert in locally native ecosystems and as such have a good understanding as to where and when fire has it place and role.

Now regarding the January 18th situation I would place it as complex and yet it could have been reduced in severity by any one of the following:

- 1) If there wasn't a serious drought beginning to stress and kill the forests.
- 2) Lower fuel loading in quadrants of fire tolerant forests.
- 3) Better pine forestry practices near urban areas ie. No logs or heading should be allowed to lie on the forest floor.
- 4) If the media was honest we may not of lost any lives and saved more properties.
- 5) The radical greenies are partly to blame by not allowing some controlled burn-offs in order to assist native regeneration where required and obviously will reduce severe fires. Eg. There currently needs to be urgent burn off upon Stirling Ridge East Basin to save the endangered *Rutidosia leptorhynchoides*. Myself, the C.S.I.R.O and the National Parks and Wildlife Service wanted it done years ago but have problems with radical greenies.
- 6) Environment A.C.T are also to blame as they have been, and still are, cutting down exotic and native species in reserves and leaving the dead material lying around waiting for that fateful day.
- 7) If people had green lawns with no water restrictions instead of the dead or dying lawns and shrubbery with its tinderbox mulch beds.
- 8) If the urban fringes were planted with elms, willows etc rather than fire prone pines and natives.

I believe that all of the above points had a part to play in the disastrous resultant firestorm.

I feel the utmost praise for all the Firefighters, Police and Emergency Services, it's because of them that more lives including their own weren't lost.

In my opinion 'Canberra' was only saved in the end by the late evening South Easterly cool change.

Now if that didn't eventuate or if the firestorm arrived 6 hours earlier we would of lost most of Canberra, Queanbeyan and beyond with a resultant death toll in the thousands.

Now will we learn anything from this? Is the coroner or inquiries independent enough from governments and the media? Also be allowed to publish an unbiased and unadulterated opinions, findings and recommendations etc? Only time will tell,

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Michael Calkovics', written in black ink.

Michael Calkovics