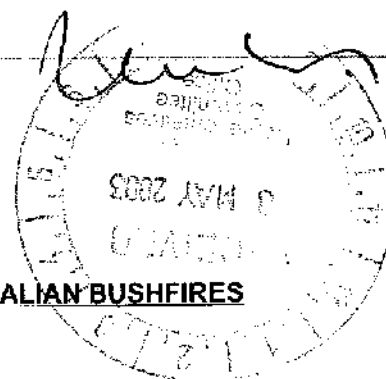


Dundas, Ian (REPS)

From: NPAQ [npaq@npaq.org.au]
Sent: Thursday, 8 May 2003 4:12 PM
To: Committee, Bushfires (REPS)
Subject: Recent Australian Bushfires



SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

from

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND INC

Clerk Assistant (Committees)
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The National Parks Association of Queensland Inc (NPAQ) offers the following comments for consideration by the House of Representatives Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires.

The bushfires which ravaged many parts of Australia, particularly in the south-east areas, were extraordinary and resulted from extraordinary climatic conditions. The severity of the fires must be recognised as extreme and not taken to be the normal situation faced by the majority of the country in ordinary bushfire seasons. There should not be an over reaction when considering measures to counter fires which are normally encountered as part of the natural Australian ecosystem.

While the debate about bushfire control is necessary and has a long history, the heightened interest results very much from the loss of property experienced in some centres. There is no wish to play down the tragedy involving human life and property, but the debate must recognise the consequences for the environment as well. The planning processes which allow development in high risk areas need to be examined and people must be educated about the risks involved in building in vulnerable locations in the Australian environment. Massive modification or destruction of that environment is not the solution in the long term.

In some sectors, there has been a tendency to blame the fires on national parks and other natural areas. Statistics show that more wild fires start outside national parks and burn into them than visa versa. Natural places should not become victims of fire counter-measures, but rather a more enlightened approach to development surrounding them is needed. The importance of such places and the need for their proper preservation must be recognised.

Hazard reduction has become a popular catchcry for many in the community. The importance of this is appreciated but it is not a solution by itself. The effectiveness of fuel reduction is questionable under the extreme conditions experienced in January of this year. Programs of hazard reduction must have regard to the ecosystems in which they are operated. Over use of fire is a threat to biodiversity and its use as a fuel reduction tool needs careful planning. Extensive clearing is not an acceptable option either. Calls for harsh measures are likely to be prominent in submissions and the Committee is urged to consider carefully the scientific evidence which does not support such reactions.

NPAQ will not comment on processes and systems employed in combating the fires as there are many better placed to do so. It has every confidence that improved communication, co-ordination and management practices will result from the recent extraordinary experiences.

Fire is a natural part of the Australian ecosystem and must be taken into account in planning processes and in people's expectations. Mitigation must not be to the irrevokable detriment of the natural environment.

L.M. Misfeld
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