

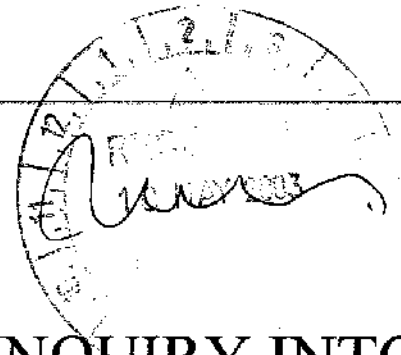
Newsome, Silvana (REPS)

From:

Sent: Friday, 9 May 2003 10:54 AM

To: Committee, Bushfires (REPS)

Subject: Submission to National Inquiry into Bushfires



SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO BUSHFIRES

Submission No.230

Re: Causes and risk factors contributing to the impact and severity of bushfires, including land management practices and policies in national parks, state forests, other Crown land and private property.

I wish to make a submission in support of the use of locked gates and fencing to restrict vehicle access to national parks and crown land in high bushfire risk areas.

My family has lived at Dollins Road, Kurrajong for three generations. Our property is surrounded by a large tract of bushland. We are 300m from the Wollemi National Park and a large area of crown land is opposite our property. McMahons Road, Kurrajong is about 500m south of our property and Cedar Ridge Road, Kurrajong is

about 500m north of our property.

Our area has been increasingly subject in recent years to the problems of arson and dumping. Fires lit by arsonists in the bushland surrounding our property sweep towards properties on Cedar Ridge Road. In one incident, arsonists dumped a car near McMahons Road and set it alight. I was personally involved in assisting the bushfire brigade from preventing the resulting bushfire from spreading towards Dollins Road and Cedar Ridge Road.

A fierce natural bushfire (part of the Grahame Creek fire) swept through this tract of bushland on Christmas Day 2001. As a result, many houses burned down on the adjoining Cedar Ridge Road.

There is presently a system of gates and fences in our area, restricting access by arsonists to this vulnerable tract of bushland. I believe these gates serve a valuable role in preventing a repeat of the devastation which occurred on Christmas Day 2001.

(a) National Parks Gates

One gate has been erected at the far end of Dollins Road where this road meets Wollemi National Park. This gate has been approved, inspected and locked by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It also has been approved by the Land and Water Conservation Department. Firefighters, as well as all types of emergency vehicles, have full access to the National Park and crown land through the gate because the National Park's padlock can be opened with standard bushfire brigade keys.

The public has pedestrian access to the National Park and adjoining areas of crown land through three staggered posts beside the gate. However, vehicle and trailer access is restricted, making it very difficult for car thieves to dump and set fire to cars in this vulnerable area.

Residents at the end of McMahons Road also asked the National Parks and Wildlife Service to erect another gate at the end of McMahons Road where it joins the Wollemi National Park to stop an ongoing problem with dumping and arson. The National Parks and Wildlife Service responded to the request by erecting a locked gate in this

location in September 2001.

On 25th December 2001, only three months after the gate had been erected, this gate saved lives. It prevented a convoy of sightseers from driving down a windy narrow trail into the National Park to see the approaching flames of the Grahame Creek bushfire. Only minutes after the sightseers were turned back by the gate, this stretch of track was engulfed in a fierce firestorm.

(b) Crown Land Gates

We have enclosed the section of reserve crown road opposite our property with fencing and gates. This section of Dollins Road is a rough bush track. It adjoins long stretches of bushland out of sight of any houses. This location is ideal for car dumping and arson. Any fire set along this section of road would directly threaten many houses along Cedar Ridge Road, only 500m away through dense bushland. Land and Water Conservation have approved of these gates and fences and have granted us an enclosure permit for this section of crown road.

The gates are not locked and the public has access

to the crown road through the gates. The bushfire brigade also has full access to this section of crown road through these gates.

Land and Water Conservation, in accordance with their management program, approved our enclosure permit to prevent arson and dumping in the adjoining crown land bushland. These activities have been causing problems in local areas of National Park and crown land for many years.

Whilst the public still have access to the crown road itself, the fences along the road prevent vehicles and trailers gaining access to the adjoining bushland areas of crown land. This makes the dumping of cars, household waste, dead animals and toxic waste, and the setting of fires much more difficult. So the gates and fences serve a useful and justifiable purpose at all times of the year.

Community Support for Our Gates

Unfortunately a local activist has been demanding the complete removal of all gates and fences to

National Parks, crown land and unused crown reserve roads in our area. This would allow unrestricted access to arsonists, dumpers and vandals and would be in violation of the management policies of both the National Parks and Wildlife Service and of Land and Water Conservation, who are the land owners. It would also make the local communities of McMahons Road, Dollins Road and Cedar Ridge Road vulnerable to unexpected fire storms in the future.

Three months after the Christmas Day 2001 bushfire, the local bushfire brigade invited the community to a debrief at the fire shed. Many residents had lost their homes or had sustained extensive property damage in that terrible fire. Residents of Cedar Ridge Road, which is the next parallel road north of Dollins Road, were particularly badly affected.

Great concern was expressed at the debrief when it was announced that an activist was lobbying to have the gates and fences on Dollins Road removed. These gates and fences were protecting the bushland between Dollins Road and Cedar Ridge Road. Letters were sent to the local member, Kevin Rozzoli, asking him to step in

against this activist.

Subsequently Land and Water Conservation formally gave us permission to retain the gates and fences on Dollins Road by granting us an enclosure permit for this section reserve crown road.

The Dollin family has a excellent relationship with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Crown Land authorities and the local bushfire brigade, and with their support we hope to continue to make this area a safe and clean place to live.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service and Land and Water Conservation have approved and supported the gates and fences on Dollins Road and McMahons Road which protect our community from arson and dumping. These government decisions have protected our community which is living in extreme hot spot for bushfires.

Recommended Strategy for Reducing Fire Risk

Our experience has shown that the appropriate use of locked gates and fencing reduces fire risk to communities living near extensive bushland in extreme bushfire risk areas. We support the National Parks' current policy of erecting locked gates on access roads into National Parks land close to residential areas. We also recommend that fencing and gates should be used to protect tracts of crown land in similar locations.

I recommend this model for any isolated tracks through extreme fire risk areas close to residences. A locked gate restricting vehicle access to such areas, preventing car dumping and arson, would protect adjoining houses from bushfire disasters. Appropriate locks should be used on the gate to ensure full access to the bushfire brigade and other essential services.

Yours sincerely,

Les Dollin
