

R.E.B.

House of Representatives Select Committee
on The Recent Australian Bushfires
Parliament House ACT. 2600

ATTENTION : Mr. IAN DUNDAS

Dear Sir,

I Raymond Edward Barnard (retired) of 577 Comleroy Road Kurrajong 2758 state the following submission on the Kurrajong bush fires that burned in December 2001. These fires were lit by lightning strikes on the afternoon of 03/12/2001 and impacted in the form of a "fire storm" on the 25/12/2001 destroying approx. 14 houses and causing considerable damage to fencing, irrigation, sheds and other infrastructure in this rural / residential area.

I have several main concerns .

Firstly I believe that this fire was the result of the remnants of the fires that were lit by the lightning strikes on 03/12/2001, although the Bush Fire Control & The National Parks & Wildlife Service have tried to produce evidence to the contrary.

They claim that it was caused by a lightning strike on the 24/12/2001 although there is no record available of any lightning strikes in the area on or around that date and as I live in the area I am not aware of any lightning in the area on or around that date, all of this evidence was given to the Coronial Inquiry held at the Katoomba local court on March 25 Th. & 26 Th. 2003 Inclusive. This fire was referred to as the "Grahame Creek Fire".

The findings of the coroner Mr. Michael Price are as yet to be handed down.

Another concern is the lack of hazard reduction on the interface of National Parks and Crown Lands that adjoin rural and residential land that is privately owned.

The evidence given to the inquiry by these bodies claimed that there had been recent back burns in this area where the National Park interfaces with this rural / residential area, however on a close inspection of their documents I found that this hazard reduction was carried out in the years of 1995 & 1996 which is five and six years respectively before these fires. I had stated that I could not remember when this area was last hazard control burned.

I can now recall that it was burned after the 1994 fires that were in another part of the Kurrajong area.

This time span of five to six years since this hazard reduction, resulted in a build up of ground fuel in the order of 30 to 40 tons of fuel to the acre of land on the interface slopes, leading to the developed area. This would clearly show that the controlled burning was not done often enough and certainly could not to be regarded as a recent back burn.

This fuel caused the fire to generate much more heat than normal due to the high fuel loading on the National Park floor and developed into a fire storm of great magnitude causing the damage to the properties that adjoin and are near the park. The local Fire Superintendent from the Rural Fire Service gave evidence that she did not recall making a transcribed statement in a "Question and Answers" for a newspaper article, stating "It was a daunting task, especially on Christmas Eve when we knew what was coming and we knew how long it was going to be".

Now if this was a fact, she clearly had a duty of care to notify the local residents that this was the case and to prepare them for the impact of the fire, by advice on clearing around their homes, having equipment and hoses, water, available and it would have deterred them from leaving their homes, as most of them had done and leaving their properties unattended because of the lack of warning.

Another concern is the policy of the N.S.W. National Parks & Wildlife Service of locking up the parks and placing obstructions, gates, heaps of dirt, rocks etc. to stop persons from having access to the trails, that they had previously.

Over the years these trails have been used by responsible drivers of 4WD. Vehicles which have wide tyres and do not cause damage to the surface as they tread very lightly. They cleared fallen timber to gain access and the trails were always cleared, well defined and provided the bush fire vehicles with good access and a ready made line to put in a back burn if required.

I do not support the use by unregistered trail bikes being allowed to cause damage to the trails however they do ride around these obstacles and can access the parks.

The National Parks in my view have a policy of locking up all of the parks, allowing them to develop into an inaccessible and unmanaged wilderness, the result of this is that when the weather conditions deteriorate to a point where a high fuel load is present and the bush is ignited by any cause, a fire storm is the result and property damage will occur due to the intense heat generated by this high fuel loading.

I have recently heard experts on the TV. And Radio state that in 40 years of fire fighting and fire studies they have never seen fires so intense.

My view is that the reason they have not seen fire so intense, is that the bush land has never been so neglected and I believe that the reason for this is the policy of locking up these National Park areas and not maintaining a hazard reduced interface area near populated areas.

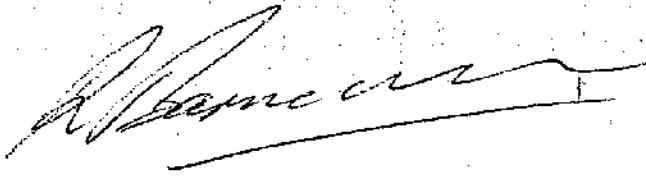
The National Park Services are charged with the responsibility of protecting the Flora And Fauna and I have never in my whole life, seen so many dead birds, possums, wallabies and the like burned to death as I saw after the fires and I can only imagine how many delicate items of flora that would have been destroyed due to the intensity of these fires, these species could now be lost forever.

I am supplying you with a copy of my statement to the Task Force Tronto and I refute any suggestion that this fire was ignited on 24/12/2001 by a lightning strike as I never saw any evidence of an electrical storm on or about that date and the Fire Control was unable to produce any recorded evidence of this from the weather experts, therefore I claim that the fire that impacted on this area on Christmas day 2001 was caused by remnants of the fires lit by a number of lightning strikes on 03/12/2001.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter that I gave to Mr. Kerry Bartlett M.P. and a copy of proof of my fire fighting experience (10 years as a fire brigade captain at Dural and an appointment as a fire patrol officer for this state.) also a newspaper article for

your perusal where the Fire Superintendent was quoted about the fires when questioned about them.

YOURS FAITHFULLY

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Raymond Barnard", written over a horizontal line.

Raymond Edward Barnard J.P.

12/04/2003