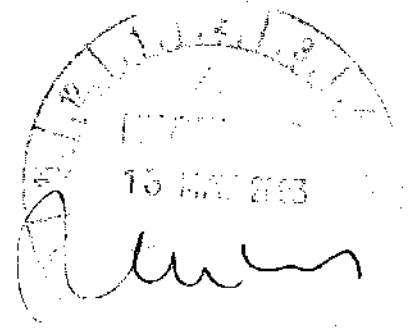


Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires

Submitted by: Carboor Rural Fire Brigade.



May 5, 2003

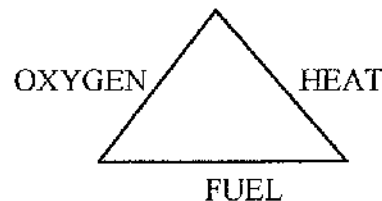
Submission No.264

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please find attached a copy of a letter, which our Brigade prepared for our Regional Office.

We believe that the crucial points, which are made in this letter, are as follows:

1. The inadequacy of the deployment of volunteers on the fire ground.
2. The lack of management on the fire ground, the fires appeared to be controlled from an office away from the fire ground where knowledge of conditions is unknown.
3. Volunteers who give of their time freely, should be able to expect that there is enough organisation that when they arrive, ready to help, that their time is used effectively.
4. A lack of rapid response to the fires.
5. The use of local knowledge, regardless of the agency that they represent, must be utilized.
6. Fuel reduction burns still remain the best preventative against large crowning Bushfires. One of the first things that volunteer fire fighters are taught is the 'fire triangle', where if one element from the triangle is removed the fire will be put out. Therefore, reducing the fuel to begin with will generally reduce the danger of having a large blaze. By making it easier to remove one of the other elements by means of water to cool or rakehoes to remove forest floor fuel (which is much easier if the cover is only a few inches deep and nor a couple of feet thick as it can be where no fuel reduction has taken place) and thereby controlling the fire.



The reduction of ground fuel build up will lead to a cooler fire, which is easier to control and less likely to 'crown'.

7. Reduction burns should involve all agencies and be used as training exercises.
8. Not using proven fire control methods, particularly back burning was a major factor in fires not being controlled at an early stage. The threat of possible liability would appear to be a major factor in the reluctance of anyone to give the order to backburn. Conditions were perfect on many occasions to effectively and safely backburn, yet

permission had to be gained from the Incident Controller, who was not on the fire ground and often unaware of current conditions. Permission was usually denied, despite the request coming from someone who had the knowledge and experience to understand that backburning would be appropriate, safe and with minimal risk.

9. Access to many bush areas has now also become an issue as many areas of National Parks, State Parks and Crown Land are closed to the general public. Therefore access tracks are not maintained, so that fire crews cannot then gain access to areas which may be needed when trying to control a fire. Tracks are critical to establish control lines from, particularly as a point from which to backburn. Our Captain requested the cleaning off of a fire track in our Brigade area, at the beginning of the last fire season, this was denied. This track is now impassable so if there were a fire on our boundary we would be unable to access this area. We also understand that many of the tracks that were made in the Catherine /Wonangatta area during the recent fires have already been barred to prevent future access.

We firmly believe that those volunteers such as ourselves now need to be listened to. (our brigade has 19 out of 50 members with over 25 years active experience each). Rather than a group of over educated inexperienced people who seem to be the ones who are in control of situations such as occurred this year. Fire fighting happens at the fire front not in an office.

We wish to thank you for giving us this opportunity to express some of our concerns and look forward to reading your outcomes to this inquiry.

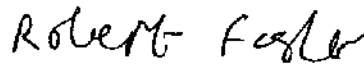


Mrs. Sue Box
Secretary
Carboor Rural Fire Brigade

Mr. Mervyn Holmes
Captain
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