

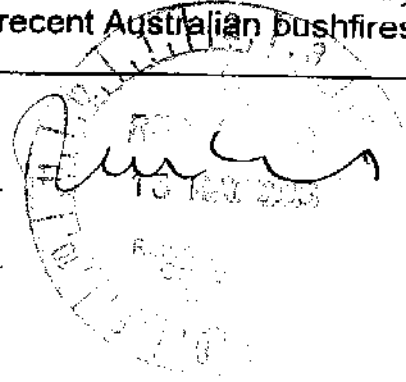
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Submission No.323

Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires

Submitted by: BRION A. FRIMER

Address: _____



Date: 9/5/2003

INQUIRY INTO THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am the owner of a 7000 acre property with my family, in Tallangatta Valley which runs Sheep and Beef Cattle. The property forms Crown Land on the Eastern and Southern boundaries, and over a long period of time I feel I have had some experience in Land Management, Fire prevention and suppression, and some qualification to comment.

I have been a member of the Tallangatta Valley Fire Brigade for 50 years, and a life member of the Rural Fire Brigades Association.

I was a C.F.A. Group Officer for 23 years and a Deputy Controller of the S.F.S. I am a member of the Australian Institute of Emergency Services (A.I.E.S.)

I have received the National Medal and Clasp for Service to the S.F.S. and the Centenary Medal for Service to the C.F.A.

I stood down in 1996 as Group Officer because I became aware of not being able to operate in that

Capacity because of the changes to the C.F.A. BOT

and their impact on successful operational decisions.

Simply there was conflict between the BOT and the Chief Officers Standing Orders.

All this now seems to have developed into a situation where because of union interference and Occupational Health and Safety regulations we have a non aggressive fire service that retreats to the asphalt road when confronted with flames.

Out of the recent fire on the North East several points arise

1. Forest Environmental Management Leaves a lot to be desired, overgrown with Blackberry and fuel loadings excessive.
2. Inexperience by Dept of NRE and CFA managers combined with being overawed by the size of the problem.
3. Reliance on Aircraft and Helicopters. Often not available because of the requirement elsewhere and couldn't fly because of smoke + weather conditions.
4. Lack of local knowledge used by management and the viability of operational decisions being made on the fire ground, not decisions made by one or two remote control centres.

This led to very poor utilization of resources and confusion on the same fire ground being run by two different control centres.

SIGNED: Blair G. Ross

5. The Impact of Occupational Health and Safety problem
Obviously at any time a fire ground is not a safe
working place and this must be recognized.

Over a long period there were few problems with
Rural people who understand fires, rust environment
and have local knowledge and that experience was
passed on. In a true rural community the local
Captain knows the people and the environment.

It wasn't until people without experience of
Bush fires eg. Urban type Prigades were put into
situations they are not familiar with, by inexperienced
fire controllers that difficulties arise. This is
becoming quite apparent when we have the Sydney
fuel reduction burnoff in winter and fires were
burnt.

6. Effect of Union influence. was demonstrated when
Career fire fighters knocked off at 5.00 and
left volunteers struggling with Contaminant fires
Some volunteers were working for 12 and 16 hours.

Fires don't understand double time, weekends, R.D.O.
etc.

On numerous occasions taking advantage of
weather conditions would have controlled fires in
the early stages.

There appeared to be very little support for the
Volunteer and Department Fire fighters, they did
a magnificent job under great odds

SIGNED: Prison & Fire

But The Management left a lot to be desired. In one instance one fire was being controlled by three different command centres, the result was on one edge firemen were trying to put it out and on the other firemen were back burning without any communication between them.

Communications constantly failed, wrong channels and bad areas. The command centre didn't know what channel some of their Task Force were on and therefore couldn't contact them.

Municipal Emergency arrangements didn't seem to be understood by those concerned and took too long to be activated. In the first 4 days firefighters were not fed properly, brigades trying to do as much as they could but with no support.

The old saying "If it doesn't work locally it won't work" is very true and still applies despite all the technology.

A large number of people in high places are talking down the overall problems and saying it all went very well, is not right, if it wasn't for the dedication of the firefighters on the ground it would have been far worse.

With the huge areas of forest burnt, the enormous loss of native animals and fauna it can only be said it didn't work.

SIGNED: Robin A. Jones