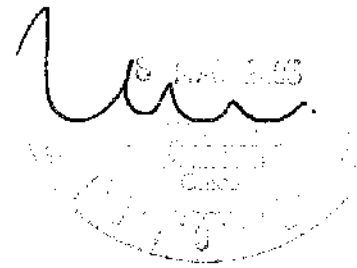


Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on recent Australian bushfires



Submitted by: Dederang Fire brigade Management Team

Address:

Date: 8th May 2003

INQUIRY INTO THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

Dear Sir/Madam

The Dederang Fire Brigade tanker was out of the shed for 26 of the 40 fire days in the north east of Victoria. Brigade members maintained crew covering day and night shifts over the period of the fires.

Brigade members wish to make the following submission and in doing so address particular Terms of Reference as specified.

Under (b) 'the causes of and risk factors contributing to the impact and severity of the bushfires, including land management practices and policies in national parks, state forests, other Crown land and private property'; and (g) 'the adequacy of current response arrangements for fire fighting'.

- ❖ In our opinion the initial response by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) was not aggressive enough. Back burning was not allowed in the first instance and when back burning was allowed, the procedure followed by the DSE was more in the nature of a 'controlled fuel burn', that is allowing the fire to come to the control lines, as opposed to correct procedure where staggered lighting of undergrowth and fine fuels would be undertaken to **burn up to the fire** from the control line.
- ❖ Brigade members would like to see more fuel reduction burns of native forested areas within their area this Autumn in order to reduce undergrowth and fine fuels, as well as provide training experience for brigade volunteers.
- ❖ Our brigade who was in charge of the Mt Jack and Glucpot fires had these fires out within hours of the lightning strikes in spite of the steepness of the terrain. Local knowledge and rapid response played a major part.
- ❖ Tankers should carry at least 6 more 38mm hoses. At the Mt Jack fire brigade members were able to stop the fire by running out 11 hose lengths (8 of our own and 3 from another tanker at the scene).

Under (c) 'the adequacy and economic and environmental impact of hazard reduction and other strategies for bushfire prevention, suppression and control'

- ❖ It is our considered opinion that the Mt Jack and Gluepot fires were brought under control by our brigade due to the fact that the forest in both areas had been fuel reduced in the last 3 or 4 years.
- ❖ The access bridge across House Creek at the end of Rogers Lane in Dederang, and within DSE land, has not been maintained and our tanker was forced to turn around and travel 20km to the Kancoona end of the Mt Jack Track in order to gain access to the Mt Jack fire. DSE responsibility to check and maintain tracks and infrastructure not undertaken.
- ❖ Access to the Gluepot fire was difficult due to lack of track maintenance in the area. DSE should be required to check all tracks at the beginning of the Summer fire season and ensure that cleaning/clearing is undertaken.

Under (h) 'the adequacy of deployment of firefighting resources, including an examination of the efficiency and effectiveness of resource sharing between agencies and jurisdictions'

- ❖ Communication between brigades and the group (or Incident Management Team {IMT}) needs to be improved. On January 9th our brigade was sent to Clover Dam with a Tanker and a Quick fill to assist with a back burn operation at 6.00pm. We arrived and waited for other brigades supposed to meet us there. After 30 minutes our Captain was contacted to find out what was happening and we were told that the operation had been cancelled during the afternoon. There were other instances where IMT requested crews but then cancelled them at the last minute, only to phone back late at night to say they had changed their minds and now wanted a crew the next morning. This was not an isolated incident.
- ❖ Changeover crews were sent up to staging areas where they would sit around for up to 3 hours. Members believe that it would have been more efficient and effective to have 'hot changeovers', that is, on the fire line, and preferably during daylight hours.
- ❖ DSE regulations/guidelines for the use of bulldozers need to be reviewed. A request was put in for the bulldozer at the Mt Jack fire to be sent to the Gluepot fire (only 10km away) but the request was refused as the bulldozer had to be washed and decontaminated. In our opinion and under the circumstances this was completely unnecessary as tankers are sent into fires from different locations and are not decontaminated between emergency fire events.

Under (h) 'as above'; and (j) 'the roles and contributions of volunteers, including current management practices'

- ❖ The DSE would not allow competent local CFA crew leaders to take charge of fires. DSE Incident Control Centre (ICC) were using outside personnel with a lack of local knowledge to run the fire operations. In some instances there was blatant disregard of local input and expertise. Members believe that a local member should have accompanied all outside personnel from both DSE and the CFA as a matter of course. The utilization of local knowledge is, in our opinion VITAL.
- ❖ On arrival at staging areas crews were split up and were unhappy about this situation. Our crews train together, have trust in one another and expect to be together on a tanker for the entire shift. There were several instances of crews being divided up and allocated to separate tankers. The standardisation of operating equipment on CFA tankers would give members greater confidence in being assigned to work with other crews.

Under (i) 'liability, insurance coverage and related matters'

- ❖ There was an incident at the Mt Elmo fire where crew, wanting to fill the tank from a Class 'A' foam drum, found that the drum contained diesel. There were 6 tankers on the shift and all crews reported the same complication on each tanker. This incident inhibited fire retardant activities at a critical time and highlighted a lack of management oversight. Better collaboration between DSE and CFA needs to occur.

SIGNED:.....JACK HICKS.....

PHONE NUMBER:..... ☎