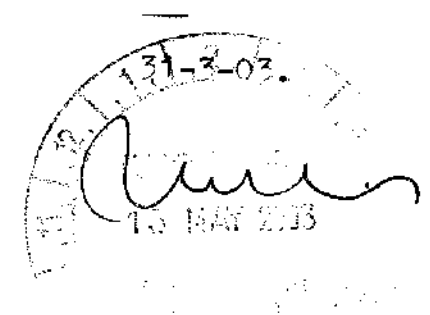


Joanna Gash,
Federal Member for Gilmore,
NCWRA.



Dear Joanna,

RE THE BUSHFIRES.

I heard on the ABC, you are on a committee to look into the recent bushfires. I enclose a copy of a letter I wrote after the Shoalhaven fires in 2002, and the answer from the then state minister. I have found the comments of both Mr. Debus and the head of the NSW National Parks very negative.

During the fire in the shoalhaven valley which started early November my daughter at Sussex Inlet rang to tell me the fire was only 8Ks. from Wingello. I was in Dubbo at the time, so I immediately returned home. I wish you could see the mess in the segment of Morton Park which my property backs on to. I have a clear 60 metre buffer between the house and the park boundary but I don't think this would stop a wildfire if it happened, there is so much fuel load on the forest floor, also there is no access into this part of the park for fire fighting vehicles. They can get through my yard to the fence but that's all.

I heard an old fireman from the Bega area, who has had over 40 years experience telling the girl on the ABC he had told National Park people they should start their hazard burns on the top of ridges, then if a fire went through it would reach the top then burn back on itself. This makes alot of sense to me as I believe a fire runs quicker to the top of a ridge than one which runs down it. I also understand forensic tests on properties in Canberra adjacent to the pine forest proved the thick leaf matter, and also the heavy mulches on gardens against these houses caused the eventual destruction of them, as fireballs pushed by the fierce winds landed in the mulches, quickly igniting them. Some mulches, especially straw type ones will also self ignite in extremely hot weather (as happened in Melbourne recently). During the months of December and January there is so much leaf fall here from the gum trees in the park, I usually rake them up at least twice a week, but then have to heap them up until I can put them through a shredder, which I do not like using in the hot weather, because it is petrol driven, and could cause a spark.

I do think many people are silly for not insuring their houses also, they can pay their policies by the month these days so in my opinion there is no excuse for their homes not being insured. Governments need to look into this problem, because it seems to be those of us who pay regularly, are copping the increases in policies for the fire levies which everyone should pay.

Sincerely,
Thelma Dennis
Thelma Dennis/

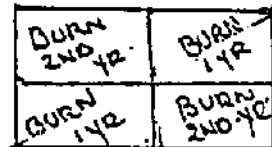
Dear Sir,

I live on a property which backs onto a piece of the Morton National Park at Bundanoon. I have a fire break of over one third of the block, but the trees in the park are so close to the boundary, and so high, one wouldn't have a hope of saving anything if a wildfire went through the area. I agree with the A.B.C. listener who suggested trees close to roads and properties should be logged. The national park lot don't do anything about hazard burning, so the fuel load in this area is tremendous.

I also have a family member who lives at Swan haven in the Sussex Inlet area. Her brother in law has a property in Medlyn avenue just down the road from her place, and during last year N.P. came in and measured all their properties, then told the residents to keep out of the park. They had been in the habit of keeping the undergrowth clear around their land. During the fire the whole area went up in flames and the only reason their houses were saved was due to a piece of earth moving machinery pushing the burning trees away from the houses, and creating some sort of a firebreak.

I would like to know why they cannot adopt the method of burning like the aborigines have been doing for centuries and a method they carry out in the N.T. They take an oblong section, divide into four, burn two segments diagonally opposite, then the next season burn the other two. Surely one doesn't need a university degree to see the advantage of this idea. One only needs common sense, something sadly lacking in many greenies and dare I say it National Park staff.

Thelma Dennis.





ATTORNEY GENERAL
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PREMIER ON THE ARTS

In reply please quote: 02/00618

Ms Thelma Dennis

19 MAR 2002

Dear Ms Dennis

Thank you for your letter of 15 January 2002 regarding fire hazard reduction in the Bundanoon and Sussex Inlet areas. I note you have also written to the Premier, the Hon Bob Carr MP, and request that you accept this as a reply to both letters.

I can assure you that the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is very much aware of the risks that bush fires pose to life and property, both within and adjoining national parks and reserves in NSW. Asset protection operations include not only prescribed burning to manage fuel levels, but also the slashing of firebreaks and liaison with its many neighbouring land owners. These are carried out within the cooperative framework of District Bush Fire Management Committees, of which the NPWS is a member along with other groups such as the Rural Fire Service, State Forests of NSW, the Department of Land and Water Conservation, the NSW Police, farming and environmental representatives and local government.

As a member of the Wingecarribee District Bush Fire Management Committee, the NPWS works closely with the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and other members of the Committee in the planning, approval and implementation of prescribed burning and other works. Over the past three years, the NPWS has undertaken four major hazard reduction burning operations in the Bundanoon area. These have been based on strategic and fire history considerations, and were undertaken in cooperation with the Wingecarribee RFS.

I am advised that the NPWS has also undertaken considerable hazard reduction activity in the Sussex Inlet area, including slashed breaks and prescribed burning. However, in the extreme fire weather experienced during January 2002, hazard reduction burning and slashed breaks proved somewhat ineffective in preventing wildfire runs. Even the construction of bare earth firebreaks by earthmovers around built-up areas immediately prior to the fires failed to prevent property losses in the Sussex Inlet area.

Apart from asset protection operations around built-up areas, the NPWS also seeks to use fire as a tool in the conservation of biodiversity within the parks and reserves it manages. For some species, it is important not to burn too frequently so that they are able to grow and set seed before the next fire event. Conversely, other plant species that require fire to germinate need to experience a fire within their lifespan so that their seed is released for future generations. Still further