

AERIAL AGRICULTURAL
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA LTD.

24 March 2003

Mr Ian Dundas
Secretary, Inquiry into the Incidence and Impact of Bushfires
House of Representatives Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Submission No.57

Dear Mr Dundas

Re: AAAA Submission to the Inquiry

Please find attached the National Aerial Firefighting Strategy developed by the Aerial Agricultural Association of Australia (AAAA) to assist with the House of Representatives Committee inquiry.

The AAAA represents the interests of many of Australia's aerial firefighting operators including both rotary and fixed wing operators. Further information on the Association can be obtained from our website at www.aerialag.com.au

Australia has a wonderful fire fighting resource available to it through the use of either agricultural type aircraft or purpose built fire bombing aircraft based on ag. aircraft designs.

Australia's agricultural aircraft fleet leads the world in terms of its level of sophistication and the professional approach pilots and operators can bring to fire fighting.

Economics also plays a part in this equation, with fire fighting aircraft from the agricultural industry being able to deliver thousands of litres of retardant or suppressant to the fire front for the least dollars of all aerial firefighting equipment. This is particularly evident where longer ferry times are required from refilling site to fire front, such as would be the case over heavily timbered country, where many bushfires in NSW, Victoria and the ACT occurred during the last fire season.

A very successful component of bush fire management in recent years in a number of States (especially Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia), has been an in-principal decision by authorities to utilise fire bombing aircraft in bush fire control, particularly through a firm commitment to aggressive initial aerial attack of fires.

There is a range of academic and field based research which clearly indicates that the use of aircraft in this role should be made a vital part of bushfire management in Australia. CSIRO's Bushfire Behaviour and Management Unit and its predecessors have carried out comprehensive research into the issue and the recommendations support the use of fire bombing and aggressive initial attack by air.

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In particular, the advantages of using aircraft in putting out or suppressing the size of fires from lightning strikes is very clear. This becomes even more effective when the fire has commenced in rugged terrain or heavily timbered areas, such as the Canberra fires' origins with some ten lightning strikes over a week before the fire reached Canberra.

Aggressive initial attack using aerial fire bombing has been proven successful in research and in the field and can be credited with the saving of millions of dollars worth of assets, both in the aggressive initial attack role and in close-in asset protection work. This is on top of the usefulness of aircraft in supporting and protecting ground based fire crews.

During various stages of the January fires, a number of fixed wing fire bombers were on the ground at Tumut awaiting better visibility and tasking from NSW controllers. However, for at least one day just before the Saturday fires sweeping through Canberra, there was sufficient visibility to see the fire front from 1000' above Canberra Airport as it came over the Brindabellas. Unfortunately, tasking onto the fires at that stage did not occur, other than helicopters being tasked into the defensive asset protection role.

Using the right tool for the right job and understanding that different tools come with different economic costs and opportunities is an important part of management of fires.

Those States that are currently using aerial agricultural operators in an aggressive initial attack role have been able to change their management approach from generally reactive to a more proactive approach - being able to contain small fires and manage them accordingly, thereby freeing resources for better training and other initiatives.

Agricultural aircraft have proven their worth in fire fighting time and time again and all States should have the same level of protection afforded by such a resource.

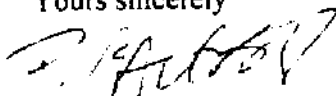
All States and the Federal Government should work together to ensure that every State has air attack coverage provided by agricultural operators over those areas strategically identified as requiring it.

The AAAA and a number of fire fighting operators would be interested in providing a demonstration on the capability of the aircraft used and related issues if the Inquiry felt that would be useful. **Please let me know if you would be interested in such a demonstration.**

As this is a relatively brief submission, the AAAA would appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee to expand upon the significant capabilities of Australia's own firefighting aircraft and personnel.

For further information or to discuss any of the issues raised, please do not hesitate to contact me on 02 6262 8256 or by email phil@aerialag.com.au.

Yours sincerely



Phil Hurst
Executive Officer