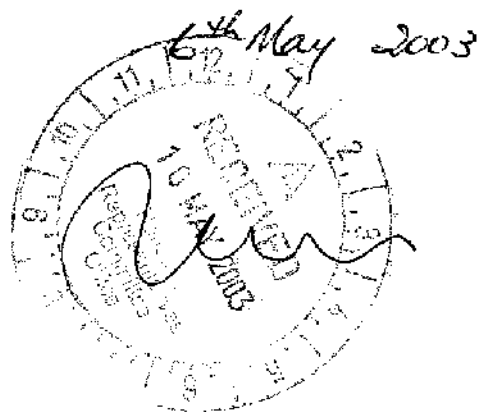


Graham Elphick

The Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the recent
-Australian Bushfires
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



I wish to make comment on the recent Australian Bushfires, specifically on issues within the Kosciuszko National Park as follows.

1. Factors contributing to the impact and severity of the fires:

Because of the huge fuel buildup in most of the KNP i.e. forest litter and woody scrub, the fire intensity was devastating to trees small and large, wildlife and their habitat and the soil, creating a huge erosion and waterways contamination risk.

Even under extreme fire weather conditions, low fuel levels would have restricted the fires by reducing crowning, speed of travel and spread and made fire suppression more feasible and safer and caused less environmental damage.

A number of photographs illustrating

levels of severity are attached.

In respect of its rhetoric, the National Parks & Wildlife Service appears, by its inaction, to be opposed to fuel reduction burning.

"Cool burning" has been carried out in our sub-alpine regions since stockmen first grazed these areas about 160 years ago. Before that, the indigenous people burned it in mosaic fashion which was copied by the stockmen.

"Cool" fuel reduction burning when correctly undertaken is a great management tool to refresh the environment, trigger germination of those grasses, flowers and trees that require fire to grow and/or prosper and to reduce fuel loads with consequent fire safety.

2. Adequacy of response to bushfires

The response by the NPWS to the fires in the northern section of the KNP should be compared to the response by NSW State Forests.

From a similar number of fires, NSW State Forests had extinguished or controlled all fires in or adjacent to State Forests in less than 2 days. State Forests have good access trails,

excellent equipment, highly skilled staff in sufficient numbers and with the drive to strike while fires are small.

I commend NSW State Forests for its efforts in the 2003 fires. In the Kosciuszko National Park, the terrain is rugged but that is all the more reason why trails should be maintained rather than closed, water replenishment storages provided in strategic locations and staffing levels and funding for Park management be reviewed.

It is apparent that the NPWS depends on "outside" firefighting services to handle the bulk of the firefighting when serious fires occur.

Without the assistance of NSW State Forests and the Rural Fire Service and associated public backup, probably all of the Kosciuszko National Park and much more of the Monaro would have been destroyed in January and February 2003.

An extract from the *Tumut & Adelong Times* (10.1.03) is attached.

3 Deployment of firefighting resources

It is obvious that too much "empire building" is occurring within the NSW Rural Fire Service. With centralisation of fire control causing consternation among

RFS volunteers.

There are many RFS members with years of experience in successfully preventing (by fuel reduction) and controlling fires in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains.

They, like NSW State Forests, know that the time to extinguish a fire is when it is still small.

They know their local areas, know how local weather can affect fire behaviour and can usually best judge the wisest approach to control a fire.

This knowledge is frequently being ignored by RFS Fire Controllers, some of whom I have had no practical fire fighting experience but give orders as to who can do what, when and how!

The issues of early attacks on a fire and backburning by a remote controller's orders in the Wedge - Bindabella are likely to be raised by the people involved.

I have had the unenviable experience of being involved in a back burn that was badly managed by a "top brass" who ignored local advice (some years ago).

The centralisation of control should only exist to monitor the fire control operation, muster reinforcements, liaise with

Government Departments including Police, Local Councils etc, ensure meals get to firefighters and above all, look bright and shiny for the TV cameras!

The Brigade Captains, in conjunction with the Group Captains, can then get on with the job of controlling the fire.

Yours faithfully

Graham Elphick