

Submission to The Select Committee on
the Recent Australian Bushfires



(A) The widespread extent of the fires of summer 2002/2003 was a reminder that bushfires are an integral part of the Australian environment. In our local area bushfires burnt out large areas of bushland and destroyed a number of houses. The town in which I live was threatened with evacuation on several occasions, and the sense of vulnerability was acute.

(B) The major contributing factor in the fires was the extremely dry weather which continued for an unusually long period of time. The Bush in Morton National Park which adjoins Bundanoon was the driest I have ever experienced, shrubs and trees were dying as were whole plant communities on shallow soil or rocky outcrops. The majority of fires were as a result of lightning strikes and as such could be said to be of natural causes. However research into Greenhouse gas induced climate change and its likely contribution to the severity of bushfires is required.

(C) Hazard reduction burns have been undertaken in a number of areas in our Shire, however given the dry conditions and strong winds experienced these were of limited effectiveness. Fires

were burning in paddocks grazed to the ground by stock and spot fires lit by burning embers many kilometres ahead of fire fronts. Local experience of hazard reduction burning in Morton National Park has shown they can encourage more prolific shrubby understorey and thus not provide the protection sought.

(D) A semi rural shire such as ours with large areas of bushland are particularly at risk from bushfires. Historical fire patterns in specific areas can be used to predict the future danger and likely sources of fire. Development will need to be restricted in areas at risk and appropriate measures taken to protect communities already existing.

(E) Research into bushfire mitigation and prevention is urgently required. Adequate training in ecological principles and effective bush fire management to all firefighting personnel is essential.

(F) The location of residential or rural residential development in high bush fire hazard areas increases the level of threat to people and their homes. This is not economically, socially or ecologically sustainable. Development should not be permitted in identified Bushfire Prone Areas

where such development is likely to endanger lives or property or involve substantial protection and suppression costs, including loss of environmental values.

(G) Current response arrangements for firefighting are limited by the nature of a largely volunteer rural fire service and the absence of full time Fire Brigades in most small towns.

(H) Regular reviews of the deployment of firefighting resources in order to determine the most effective use of personnel and equipment should be undertaken.

(I) Lack of Insurance for a large number of victims of the Canberra bushfires was a disturbing factor.

The affordability of Insurance should be ensured and education as to its necessity be undertaken.

(J) Volunteers form the backbone of rural fire services and every effort should be made to ensure

recent restructuring does not disadvantage members. Facilities should be provided to ensure the adequate training and resourcing of the service.

Jim

Clark

additional research into the role of greenhouse gas induced climate change in increasing

the frequency of bushfires;

Since the last major fire in the Park in 1983 a large

(b)

(d)

appropriate land management policies and practices to mitigate the damage caused by bushfires to the environment, property, community facilities and infrastructure and the potential environmental impact of such policies and practices;

(E) any alternative or developmental bushfire mitigation and prevention approaches, and the appropriate direction of research into bushfire mitigation;

"The Greens want to see the establishment of an ongoing research program into the ecological effects of bushfire, with the objective of ensuring that fire management programs are compatible with ecological sustainability and the maintenance of biodiversity."

(f)

the appropriateness of existing planning and building codes, particularly with respect to urban design and land use planning, in protecting life and property from bushfires;

(g)

the adequacy of current response arrangements for firefighting;

(h)

the adequacy of deployment of firefighting resources, including an examination of the efficiency and effectiveness of resource sharing between agencies and jurisdictions;

- (i) liability, insurance coverage and related matters;
- (j) the roles and contributions of volunteers, including current management practices and future trends, taking into account changing social and economic factors.