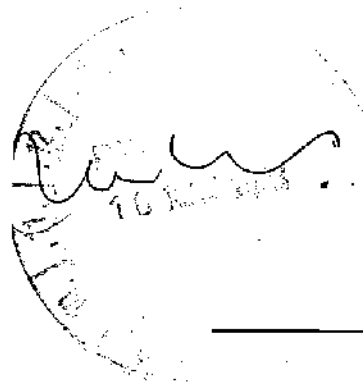


Submission No. 174



Rita Bentley

Submission to the Federal Government Inquiry into the recent Australian bushfires

I am a resident of the leafy eastern suburbs of Melbourne. I was cocooned from the direct effects of the bushfires but still have huge personal concerns that led me to prepare this submission. It should be noted that I am also the author of the submission by the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria. The difference with this submission is that it is a very personal view.

One evening during the fire crisis, I was speaking by phone to a dear friend who was watching the fire approaching her home near Beechworth in north-eastern Victoria. She was terrified and she was angry. She asked the question – how can that bastard Bracks really believe that national parks are working properly when I have to deal with this? Luckily her home was spared.

Another day I had cause to ring a person in Omeo. I was apparently lucky to catch her inside her house as she and her partner had spent days – not just 9-5 but full, 24 hour days – extinguishing burning embers that were landing on and around their property. She was exhausted.

Other stories abound of farmers who have spent their lives on the land who have simply ‘given up’ following the fires – they no longer have the will to do all the hard work that is needed just to get back to square one. The recovery for some will just never happen. They will leave. Others will stay but only because they see no alternative – they feel trapped. This situation is made even more bitter by the fact that they see a direct link between public land mismanagement and the extent of the fires.

These are all people who should know, they have spent many years on the land and deserve the care of the people entrusted to govern the state for all Victorians. The current system of public land management is failing. It is putting lives at risk.

I trust that the Members of the Committee will not abandon these people. They need your help.

Signed:

Rita Bentley