



To the M I R for Indi, Ms Sophie Panopoulos,

Dear Sophie,

I am writing this submission to the Federal Bushfire Inquiry, because I have serious doubts about the ability of the CFA to **prevent the spread of fire**, when it is not in total control of the operation from start to finish.

The blinkered approach by the conservation movement, renders it impossible to extinguish fires in difficult country, because of lack of access, desire and finally manpower. The main cause of the start of the 2003 North East fires was lightening strikes. As far as I know, **all** of these strikes were in NRE control areas. Only one was extinguished; illegally by the local Cheshunt CFA in direct opposition to the NRE personnel directive!

I am concerned about the proliferation of National and State Parks along the Western side of the Dividing Range. It should be noted that fires burn uphill and downwind, so the fire risk in the Warby, Chiltern and Box-iron bark forests is enormous, if not immediately put completely out once alight.

These parks, from Wodonga to Wangaratta form the base of a triangle that leads to My Hotham, up the Ovens and Kiewa catchments and ridges. Similar systems exist, from Wodonga to Tallangatta, and from Wangaratta to Violet Town.

It should be noted that the four fires that were extinguished in the subject areas, three were surrounded by farmland, where fuel reduction by grazing and other activities is carried out. It should also be noted that fuel reduction by rabbit plagues has been an important factor, around rivers, creeks, farmland and forests, in the past. The reduction of rabbit numbers is also the cause of major, if not total, alteration to bio-diversity over all of the state.

I have had no input into the fires, as I am no longer allowed to man a CFA tanker, my age of 75 years renders me redundant. I have had however a long association with the alpine regions. 70 years of travel across the Alps gives some familiarity. I have noted that the plant growth has increased over the past 30 years or so. This is not unique, the naturalist A E Douglas recorded it over 100 years ago, and correlated it with solar radiation. Today, it is supposedly caused by Greenhouse gas Emissions, despite the fact that solar activity has recently been recorded as the highest ever, since first charted by Christian Wolfe.

For many years, I have been a visitor to Benambra, Omeo and Ensay Mountain Cattle Sales. I have noted the build up of grass cover on the Omeo common, and the Swifts Creek road. This is the direct consequence of the banning of the cattle drives and local Government laws banning burning, grazing, slashing or spraying of roadsides. I saw the Omeo fire pass through the town common on television; it is obvious that the fire was fueled by grass along the Swifts Creek road, and it was so intense, the fences on both sides of the road were totally destroyed.

This example should be a warning to landholders that Local laws, regarding roads and reserves, landcare plots and plantations, creek and river rehabilitation areas, can in fact become dangerous fire hazards.

The Fire Act states that any fire, including lightening strike, on private land, if allowed to escape, the landholder is then responsible for any neighbour's damage. These fires were started by lightening strike on Public land; and consequently the law should be consistent, and the Government therefore responsible for damage to private land, and compensation paid for loss of fences and pasture etc. Fire and Tempest Insurance on both public and private land needs to be clarified, as there seems to be differences evident at present.

All the States have different views on fire and compensation, so it is constitutionally correct for the Federal Government to intervene through the Ministerial Council.

Finally, I am convinced there is a far more definite fire cycle than the one defined by the CSIRO in 1956. Briefly, the major cycle peaks around 90 years, with intermediate cycles of 22 years or so. The peak cycles of 1852 and 1940 will see the next high danger period of 2025 to 2035.

The possibility of a lightning strike on Halls Gap, burning all of Victorian forests in the future, is a real possibility under current management practice.

I support the previous published articles in the local press by Bill Robinson of Porepunkah, Allan Mull of Tawonga and Simon Paton's "Case of Burning Neglect"

I remain,  
Yours Faithfully,

T.R. Walpole.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "T.R. Walpole". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.