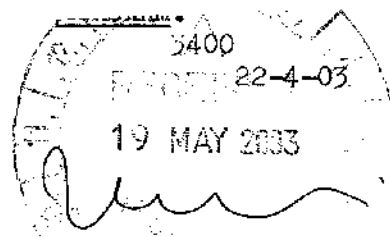


Submission No.331

Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires,
Parliament House
CANBERRA .

Committee Secretary

Dear Sir/Madam,



Just a short submission on my experiences with fire in rural and forest areas over many years. Being over eighty years old I have seen vast improvements in the method of fighting fires, progressing from breaking bough beaters from roadside bushes, wet bags and leather flappers. Then knapsacks were introduced, and one knapsack was worth many beaters. Then the fire trucks and pressure pumps were worth dozens of knapsacks. Much later of course aerial bombing.

Given moderate wind conditions and fuel load all the above methods work quite well. However when you are confronted with situations where everything is against you it is a vastly different proposition.

High fuel loads and strong winds and all the other adverse conditions nature puts on, it is well nigh impossible to control huge conflagrations, it does not matter how many resources you have at your disposal. You just cannot get near enough to attack the fire edge.

Then you have to resort to backburning, this exercise is fraught with danger on bad days. This leads to the argument that fuel reduction burns are the main way to prevent fires from spreading too much.

Several very dry winters have made Autumn fuel reduction burns extremely hazardous to carry out. At the best of times there is a certain element of risk attached. They are a very costly and time consuming exercise at the best of times. There are however plenty of examples where fuel reduction (strategic) has saved the day.

The various States have locked up vast further areas in National Parks with insufficient resources to properly manage them. Conservationists are very keen to preserve forests for their grandchildren. You cannot lock up and guarantee that a park will be there for the future, it is easier to fly to the moon.

It would be interesting to have figures on how many "Green People" put in the hard yards combating our recent fires.

Distasteful as it is to some people the only way I can see out of having huge fires develop, is a comprehensive fuel reduction program carried out at the required intervals.

People caught in acts of arson have to be dealt with more severely, it can be as serious as murder and should be treated that way.

People need to be made aware of the dangers of building in their idyllic "Retreats". Very high insurance premiums could act as a deterrent.

Farmers and other landholders need every incentive to own an effective fire fighting outfit. The more there are about there is a better chance of someone arriving at a fire scene early, a few gallons of water early is worth millions later on.

In conclusion I would like to wish you success in your findings, and that the various states have the guts to implement them forthwith.

Yours in interests of a safer Australia,

Laurie Crouch.

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