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Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires

Submitted by: GEOFF LUCAS

Address: _____

Submission No.292

Date: 10/5/2003

INQUIRY INTO THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

Dear Sir / Madam,

I support the recommendations of the Eureka Project. I desire to be heard at the inquiry both in public and in confidence. I was threatened with prosecution for backburning the Box Ironbark National Park. My notes on the fire will be available then if requested. Included is a submission to the RFA 2 Pages + Page 4 and 5 of my submission to the 'living Murray'. Yours Sincerely, G.W. Lucas

Tel 0357287257

Geoff Lucas

To the Manager, Strategic Forest Planning
 Natural Resources & Environment
 PO Box 500, East Melbourne VIC 3002

Wooragee
 8/6/1999

Submission to N.E. Vic R.F.A.

My family company proudly manufactures Australian made portable sawmills at Beechworth, designed primarily for value adding privately owned timber, our market is predominantly farmers and growers of privately owned trees, it is interesting to note that our sales in suburbia are the highest per area.

So locally we do not have a direct vested interest in timber grown on public land, the international use of them however, is different.

It was very disappointing, to read in the paper, that it is proposed that there is to be even less public forest resource here in the N.E. to be available to offset our multi million dollar bill for imported timber products.

I believe the import bill is almost equal to the total production from irrigated agriculture in Murray Darling Basin- worth 3 billion- where water diversion has recently been capped.

It is understood that our world renown E. Regnans is naturally adapted to fire and suited to the high rainfall mountains of N.E. Victoria. Most of these fastest and tallest growing trees germinated after the January 1939 fires, when 21,000 square kilometres or 80% of our public reserved forest was wiped out. The regrowth in the following wet year, came up as thick as hairs on a dogs back, the new forest is now so over populated, most of it will not make sound logs. Foresters, firefighters and sawmillers for 30 years were fearful of the critical danger of a regrowth fire, before these trees were mature enough to produce seed. (W.S. Noble 1977- *Ordeal by fire*. P.67.) Steve Crabb, in the introduction, said "This is a book that every Victorian should read".

The following 1939 Royal Commission prompted the formation of the Country Fire Authority. Though it is acknowledged that logging may increase the frequency of fire it is probably less than the the risk involved with recreation. Periodic burning is essential.

The forest we have now is nothing like the presettlement forest that the pioneers described. My Great Grandfather and my Grand father were both specimen collectors for the Vic govt botanist F. Mueller. Who used to place some regnans seed in his many overseas letters, and add- 'from these microscopic seeds giants will grow'. He also planted Blackberries!

I didn't meet my Great Grandfather, but my Grandfather born at Colac in 1862 explored the Otway, Gippsland and N.E. forests with his father as young as 10 and later as a teamster he carried supplies to the diggings at Ormeo and a ten ton boiler to Glen Wills. He described the forests to me as open and easily traversed with large trees as few as 5 or 10 to the acre, with the gullies and valleys well grassed, which supplied ample feed for the bullock team.

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He described the forests to me as open and easily traversed with large trees as few as 5 or 10 to the acre, with the gullies and valleys well grassed, which supplied ample feed for the bullock team. Hume and Hovell in 1824 crossed the Stanley plateau and the Ovens with a wagon in tow, and they described the hills and valleys as 'scantily timbered' and extremely beautiful. Eugene Von Guerrard's 1866 painting of the Wonnangatta, is consistent with this description.

Now there is a wilderness of blackberries or St john's wort up almost every gully, with forest floor a sea of bark, leaves and limbs under trees so thick few grazing animals native or introduced can survive, a repeat of 1939 could happen again, when it does because of current conditions, it will be hotter. The carbon credit argument is just so much foolish nonsense, the only carbon sink that will occur, is when the ashes land on the pacific ocean!

The world wide situation is changing. We have many portable mills operating in many overseas countries under differing government policies. In California for example low impact, selective cut, portable mills are operating in spotted owl country under the supervision of the Dept of Forestry and the Sierra Club.

In Alaska where the government grants each citizen an annual 10000 board-foot selective cut allocation out of the Tongass National Forest, our Australian made mills are accredited to operate at the stump in the Tongass, where the more common trailer mounted portables are not, because they drag in logs and leave a mess .

Lastly, it would be ecologically realistic in NE Vic to adopt a similar policy to Alaska, this would create opportunities for unemployed and environmental minded people, most of them would jump at the chance of milling their own timber, it would cut down on our imports as well as produce a more sustainable supply of sound logs, and help open up the forest for the Long Footed Potoroo and other endangered animals.

Geoff Lucas- Senior adviser Lucas Mill Pty. Ltd.

I would be pleased to make further comment if clarification is sought.

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6. EVAPORATION TRANSPIRATION and CREDITS

Trees overpopulate most of the public lands within the public catchments, creating a fire hazard and squander precious runoff!

Existing forests are greenhouse neutral, there are no carbon credits in National Parks unless the wood is used for fuel!

Where high quality runoff is generated by cleared land it should be acknowledged as a credit, for it more than compensates for transpiration losses due to privately owned trees. **Rather like environmental salinity credits- Runoff credits should be established, based on the difference between cleared and uncleared land, and I suggest at least 50% of this to be fair to all without the need for an unjust buy back ??**

Private dams collecting private runoff in the salt free steeper high rainfall catchments are generally low surface to volume, and any leakage is beneficial to the environment.

These facts should be considered and compared to the massive losses, from salt and algal plagued shallow storages in the lower catchments,

Forty years ago my father who had lifelong experience with irrigation commented when passing the proposed Chowilla Dam site- "It will become an artificial Lake Eyre!"

Replanting of saline recharge zones is welcomed; keeping in mind the salt problem in this steeper high rainfall area is rare or not an issue.

At a timber industry meeting at Myrtleford, when salinity credits were being discussed, I asked a question, after saying "...". My family company manufactures sawmills, so we are all in favor of growing trees. I have recently spent five weeks in South Africa, land managers there were concerned that Australian Eucalypts and Acacias were drying up their rivers and creating a fire hazard, they are now removing them! Do you think it is a good idea to grow trees in the high rainfall, region just to gain salinity credits?

Lakes like Mokoan and Alexandrina should be reviewed for living Murray credits.

Alexandrina previously a tidal arm of the sea now wastes by evaporation 1.6 million megalitres of river flow. (Volume quote -Don Blackmore) The blocked mouth has more to do with lack of tidal flux than lack of river flow, wave dominance or long shore drift.

Mokoan stores 360000MI delivers 27000MI of doubtful quality, evaporates much more than it delivers. Retire 50% for flood retardation, evaporation credits would more than compensate for gains attributed to the total extinguishment of private rights.

A structural choke in the Broken River above Benalla and a floodway to divert flood peak flows to the air space created would prevent a repeat of the 1993 disaster, and save millions in damages all the way to Nathalia. (See page 2)

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I have built many contract dams since 1972, in most cases supervised with advice by relevant Govt. Department Officers. Les Mitchell, Brian Boyle, Malcolm O'Mara, Rod Clutterbuck, Joe Gawne, Harold Craig. All were very helpful with technical advice. The Baxter Committee recommended section 8 be retained, and that farmers argue their case after the dam is built (on a drainage line of course) without a license.

The legal question for water caught in a drainage line from a catchment entirely within a farmers own boundary is yet to be resolved.

My son and daughter each built two modest dams four years ago, on land excised or owned separately with my assistance based on the above report, my son had his rights 'grandfathered' by G.M.W. yesterday.

His dams are on a creek that drains from near Mt Pilot in the new Box Ironbark National Park, most of it burnt on January 21st this year. Before this fire and the drought stressed trees grew so densely, access was very difficult and very little if any runoff occurred.

I will be surprised if many of them survive.

Wooragee was classed as lightly timbered by the Surveyor General Dec 19th 1855.

On his 80th birthday, George Ward born 1899 said "We grazed cattle on the Pilot range" I replied "There are only gum nuts, sticks and leaves there now George, what did they eat?"

He replied "That's right now, but before the 1927 fire, you could drive a horse and gig anywhere, only a few big trees to the acre and native clover grew very well every spring, but before 1917 we rounded up shorthorn heifers with calves at foot, rolling in fat and full of milk in February each year, till rabbits arrived. The rabbits ate it bare then it wouldn't feed a goat. After the 1927 fire we had a few wet years, it then turned to scrub."

There are about twenty permanent springs on 'Jilba' (aboriginal for springs) and no dams.

I have opportunity irrigated from them for many years by gravity piped through sprinklers. This year nearly all of them are dry for first time since I arrived 40years ago.

I welcome the opportunity to convey these comments to the committee for consideration.

I would be pleased to be heard preferably in NE Vic, to provide further information if the committee considers it would be useful.

Yours Sincerely G.W. Lucas

My credentials

62 yrs farming experience.

Reformed irrigator.

40 yrs Volunteer fireman

30 yrs Agricultural Contracting. (Hay, Laser Land Grading, Dam design and construction)

Retired hay and water conservationist

Inventor, amateur mechanic and astronomer.

Rebel National Party central councilor.

Ag Science. Diploma Entrance Echuca Technical College 1957.

28 yrs Murray Darling Assn. Representative

15 yrs Local Government 1975-90

10 yrs Small woodlot machinery design and manufacture.

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