

Ames
21 August 03

We Can Do Something About BUSHFIRES

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25th June 2003

Apathy & Complacent

While the recent bushfires created much excitement of passion, anguish and frustration also a big expense to the whole of our community, it is now about 16 weeks since the danger was still rearing its ugly head, do all those people realise its now only about 16 weeks until the danger may begin to be upon us again, in areas other than that which was burnt.

We don't need to wait again until the imminent danger is upon us, so why hasn't the bureaucrats that had so many theories of control a few short months ago been doing something to try and put control measures in place to help prevent the problem?

The reason as I see it is that the authorities have not got competent employees that understand the weather, condition of the bush – or recognise how to accomplish a safer environment while Mother Nature permits.

For over 30 years now red tape has taken a stronger hold on preventing "Bushmen" from helping to prevent disaster during our summer periods. It has been proven that all the teaching at "Forest Schools" and Universities and the influence of the "greens" element, also with the demise of the "old hands" from Forest Commission days. Has led to an erosion of the defence of out of control bushfires.

Under the "Duty of Care" we as fellow countrymen should have equal respect for nature's assets and for private assets, as is our training for all workplaces, if there is a problem or obvious danger within our environment it should be "made safe", the same applies for our asset of nature, because as is now obvious we are not protecting our forests resource.

The land our Cities and towns are built on was forest only 200 years ago, the urban sprawl takes more of nature's gift at a rapid pace everyday, but who questions the blatant destruction it causes, by the greed of Real Estate turnover, also the depletion of vast tracts of valuable farming land that is being covered by subdivision development, yet there is many moves afoot to try to grow more trees in what is already bush, there is not an effective system of control in place to keep the forests safe, which jeopardises the safety and livelihoods of many people. It may be that the influences of decision are by people without a background of competency from experience.

It was interesting to note that during the recent bushfires that the main weapon of defence was mineral earth breaks, and the use of manpower, with limited help from aircraft. Our main defence system resorted to mineral earth breaks, which are considered to be taboo, but it is hard not to go back to basics in an emergency when all else fails. With prior planning a lot of the expense of rehabilitation could have been avoided.

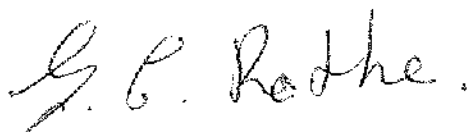
How many of the volunteers, landholders and contractors got to have a say in the control and preventative measures that could have been implemented prior and post. The vast majority of workers and people directly affected have not been able to have a break or time "off in lieu" of their efforts and there are a lot of volunteers "out of pocket" because of the time they willingly gave so that we still have some unspoilt areas of recreation and commerce.

We cannot overlook the valuable resource of manpower, amongst the ranks of workers, how many were people of influence when it comes to decision making for the so called protection of our public assets of nature of which we all have equal equity.

As has been proven modern technology is not the answer to all methods of control. Before it's too late bureaucrats and the minister responsible for our environment need to take on board some practicable knowledge from those in our communities who have a background of experience which could work in conjunction with our authorities of control.

Don't wait another 3-4 months and let us be told it's a bad fire season looming ahead, and the private sector alone should prepare themselves in defence of this beast of nature, because of the inefficiency of our government authorities.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. C. Rothe".

Gilbert C Rothe

Gilbert Rothe

FIRE PREVENTION CONFERENCE

Mr Chairman Ladies and Gentlemen,

Between my father and myself we have a total of 110 years of being indigenous inhabitants of East Gippsland.

I have been involved with agriculture and forest work all of my life. I have worked in the forest industry as a commercial harvester, processing timber to firewood, saw logs, pulp wood, fencing material, road building, silver culture, tree lopping and waste products from vegetation activities.

I have been a C.F.A. member for 13 years at the Mount Taylor Fire Brigade and have completed a number of minimum skills training.

Personally I take a deep interest in the management of our forests. I have seen many changes during the last 35 years in the way in which our forests are controlled. Many decisions that have been made concerning our forests go against the basic rules of nature, eg. fuel reduction.

We need objectives and strategies to achieve goals that can be to everyone's advantage, health and safety, as well as sustainability of the forest industry.

My Own Quotes

Fire and water are mans best friend and worst enemy.

Fight fire with fire.

We need a co-ordinated approach to the future.

I consider myself a sensitive environmentalist.

Fires do not only burn more furiously between office hours of 9am and 4.30pm from Monday to Friday.

Some Issues to be addressed are:

The roadside management act being implemented by our local councils.
Also areas subject to native title claim.

Who is the Crown Land Manager.

During the Bogong Complex of fires I was a Dozer driver operator, along with a number of other contractors. During this time I liased with many people from all walks of life and have compiled a number of notes during the operation, which could

Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the state south of the Hume Highway and east of Melbourne or about $\frac{1}{3}$ of state forest and national parks in that area have been affected by this fire.

The challenge as I see it, can we prevent the other $\frac{3}{4}$ of this land mass from being burnt.

To be competent in this field takes years of listening, watching and experience. If we do not take advantage of those within our communities that meet this criteria of knowledge that has been gained over several generations we will lose the experience within the next 20 – 30 years.

I feel that more work needs to be done to achieve fire prevention. The elements of performance criteria can be obtained from suitable persons with the scope that identify with the reality of Mother Nature.

NOT FROM BUREAUCRATS.

Which means: An official who works by fixed routine without exercising intelligent judgement.

I propose full time Fire Strategy Liaison Officers which should be generated for all regions of the State, or even Nationally.

Gilbert Rothe

Other Points

Acute danger days all personal should be on stand-by, not in the hotel, etc. even if not on duty, (private and public).

Whether smoke be from wild fires or from fuel reduction fires, there is no difference.

Blaming the prolonged drought, but October 2001 to July 2002 was the wettest summer for 50 years, and the greenest summer south of the divide.

Personnel from NRE or Parks have not got a confident approach to fire, young and inexperienced.

A lot of fires are doing a good job, but the burning needs to be at the right time of year.

There was a breakdown of communication between "staff, control and workers".

Infrastructures of a grid system of fire protection in place, do not rehabilitate

FIRE CONTROL
INCIDENT CONTROLLER
FIRE STRATEGY LIAISON
OFFICER

Job Description

Field representative to determine on job strategies, liaise with Department staff, Landholders and members of the public.

Able to recognise and recruit additional staff as required, implement the distribution of maps and information for the area.

Gather information, record and report, check progression dead lines and quality of work.

Hold information sessions for potential contractors and personnel requirements, tactics methods, operation requirements, map reading, O.H.&S, P.P.E risk assessment.

Consult and liaise with Landholders.

Must be competent horse rider.

Knowledge to focus across all regions and be adaptable to any area.

Be able to recognise altitude and climate differences of areas.

Have a background of bush practices relating back to early settlement.