

**Newsome, Silvana (REPS)**

**From:**  
**Sent:** Friday, 9 May 2003 5:53 PM  
**To:** Committee, Bushfires (REPS)  
**Cc:** wildfield@bigpond.com.au  
**Subject:** Fw: Bushfire Submission



I am resending this with the correct email address.

Tim Webb.

----- Original Message -----

**From:** KATHLEEN AM WEBB  
**To:** bushfires.rers@aph.gov.au  
**Cc:** wildfield@bigpond.com.au  
**Sent:** Friday, May 09, 2003 3:25 PM  
**Subject:** Bushfire Submission

Submission No.179

Dear Sir,

Thankyou for the opportunity to be involved in this inquiry.

I am the Captain of the Fairlight Bushfire Brigade and our property "Fairlight" is situated aprox. 8km north of Uriarra and joins Brindabella National Park on our western side.

I have several issues that worry me. We have always been concerned about bushfires, almost every summer there is dry grass that can burn and we, like most farmers and graziers, are particularly careful not to start any. However we can not control two common causes of bushfires 1. Arsonists. Who ever lit the fires that burnt Stromlo Pines at Christmas 2001 is yet to be caught. Many fires have been deliberately lit. 2. Lightening. This district seems to get it's fair share. On 1st Jan1998 for example lightening lit 2 fires on Baldy Range, one near Holloway Springs, one on Dingi Dingi Ridge, all these within Brindabella National Park, and one near the Brindabella Valley. Four of these fires were contained on the day but the Dingi Dingi Ridge fire took several days to control and burnt aprox. 200ha.

1. The recent fires were not a one in a hundred year event as some people have said. 1952 fires burnt most of Stromlo and right through what is now Weston Creek Woden and Tuggeranong, started by Lightening and it should be noted that there were very few fire trucks around then. 1939 fires which, as was passed down by my grandfather, spotted from Pig Hill on the west of Fairlight to Weetangera and lit seven fires there.

2. Back burning. As we will not be able to prevent fires from starting in the future, I believe it is vital that we have fire trails that are wide enough to enable backburning to be carried out much more quickly than was the case around the McIntyre's Hut / Baldy Range fire. We also need some firebreaks which have enough vegetation removed from both sides of the trail. The Doctors Flat Road and Fire Break Trail both used to be firebreaks. Proper firebreaks would provide a safe haven for those carrying out the back burn. Some fire fighters were instructed to backburn from narrow trails where the tree canopy was touching above them. When the vegetation hasn't been burnt for a while then some trees near the trail produce embers and firebrands which can easily blow or fall across the trail onto the unburnt area. This is extremely dangerous to the fire fighters especially after a while when some trees burn through either at the base or higher up and fall. Basically if the vegetation hasn't been burnt for some time then it will burn with a greater intensity, greater flame height and increased likelihood of spotting over the trail. We must accept that some clearing is necessary and some strategic firebreaks will enable fire fighters and land managers to more safely and effectively control the inevitable fires.

3. One way traffic. Doctors Flat Road and Two Sticks Road. Both these roads need to be widened in some places to enable safe two way traffic of fire tankers. This would also enable the bulk water tankers and loaders or floats carrying bulldozers to more quickly access the area. There were several times during the fires when convoys met and one was forced to reverse. There is potential for units to become trapped if for example a vehicle puts a wheel in a ditch or over the bank and becomes stuck while trying to reverse. Add to that situation a close fast running fire and a serious situation could occur.

4. Some fuel reduction burning must be done in the future when required. A small sacrifice short term to provide the means to control fires, to provide safe havens for wildlife and to prevent the destruction of much larger areas. The director of NPWS stated after the fires that every one knows that the fuel build up was only in the wetter gullies and that every one knows that you can't get that fuel to burn unless it's done during the peak of the dry summer. It is true that

some of these gullies are very hard to light during the cooler months when proscribed burning is carried out. However, he is quite wrong about the only fuel being in those gullies as the range and intensity of the fires shows. There had to be high fuel levels in many areas as there had been no bushfires or hazard reductions carried out in Brindabella National Park in many years. I believe 1995 was the most recent hazard reduction. The amount of spotting also points to this problem of virtually maximum fuel build up. The director also stated that it complicated to reduce the high fuel levels. However complicated, it simply has to be planned, carried out safely and reasonably effectively and monitored so these large wildfires can be controlled or even prevented in the future. Some mechanism needs to be put in place as the present system is obviously not working for the NPWS and other land managers.

5. Recognition of the valuable role played by fire fighters using private vehicles equipped with pumps, tanks and hoses etc. We have a four wheel drive with 400lt water which I used as Captains vehicle through out the emergency. It was vehicles like these, known as "Cat 9" fire units, which were used to investigate the fires on day one and for subsequent back burning work and property protection and mopping up. Due to the dry conditions we had trees and tree stumps which were still smouldering 4 weeks after the fire. Last year the FCO at Yarrowlumla told me that he would not be calling our private vehicle to a fire when the only fire truck we have is a two wheel drive Dodge "Cat 2" and not able to access all areas where the lightning strikes occurred.

6. There was a problem of who was to be responsible for the management of the fire in the National Park. I reported the smoke to Firecom in Queanbeyan by radio and later on the 8th Jan we were instructed to do property protection at Dingo Dell. On Thursday 9th we were instructed to assist with raking a trail near the power line near Brindabella. This job actually needed a D8 bulldozer to complete. What was difficult for us is that instructions were coming from "Parks Base" then "Parks Control" and I assumed that National Parks staff were in charge. As it turned out the Queanbeyan Fire Control Centre was not fully used until the Sat three days after the start. This should not happen in the future, fires should be dealt with by the agency set up and trained for fire suppression, the Rural Fire Service. For example I understand that our Group Captain was told he was interfering by the FCO when he was contacting Fairlight and Brindabella Brigades on the phone. Again this gave me the impression that we, the local brigade, were not being involved and this must be a National Park matter.

7. For future fires we need to be able to directly attack the fire when small and more easily controlled and if this means putting in a new fire trail quickly and also using Remote Area Firefighter Teams then all the better. I believe valuable time and advantageous weather conditions was lost because some people were unreasonably concerned about damaging the environment, look at how huge areas have now sustained long term damage and large numbers of wildlife and stock destroyed.

For information losses at Fairlight include 480ha of pasture and bushland burnt. The pasture included two newly sown paddocks and some quite reasonable feed, fortunately only one large round bale of hay burnt, nine km of boundary fences and approx. 15 km of internal fences burnt. A quantity of polly pipe, stored fencing materials, one small shed, gal pipe and gal barbed wire plain wire and hinge-joint had much of the gal burnt off it. Over nine ha of four year old radiata pine, around 9000 trees all hand planted fertilized and maintained were all burnt. Approx. 2 ha of 2 year old pines lost. Numerous old native paddock trees which provided good shade. Four native and introduced tree windbreaks and shelter belts damaged. A stockpile of 4 to 500 tonnes of red gum and yellow box firewood burnt away to nothing.

Finally it is disturbing that a lightning strike on 8th January can develop into such a destructive blaze and destroy so much over a week later when you consider the knowledge and resources available for its control.

Tim Webb