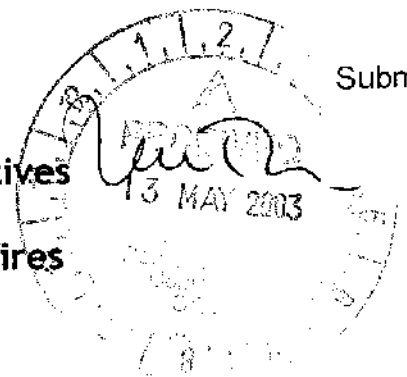


Submission to The House of Representatives

Inquiry into the Recent Australian Bushfires

8th May 2003



Prepared by The Rural and Regional Committee of the NSW Division of the Liberal Party of Australia

Please note this submission represents only the views of The Rural and Regional Committee. It is not the policy of Liberal Party of Australia.

This submission was prepared after canvassing the views of regionally based members within the state of NSW. Members focussed their responses on the management of National Parks. There was a strong view that the management of National Parks had been a fundamental cause of the intensity of the bushfires. There was an acknowledgement that the prolonged dry conditions had exacerbated the wildfires and many of the fires had started on private land and spread to Crown land. This did not however mitigate the situation once the bushfires established themselves in the National Parks. Respondents were quite clear that a failure to undertake sufficient fuel reduction strategies was the primary cause of the abnormally destructive fires experienced last season.

Rather than trying to apportion blame and analyse community attitudes to Fuel reduction, The Rural and Regional Committee felt it was more productive to propose an alternative approach to the management of Crown Estates - notably National Parks. The proposal is for a an interim classification of estate called **State Parks**.

The features of the State Parks would be :-

- *It is self-funding - potentially through forestry, restricted grazing leases, tourism
- *It remains accessible to recreational users
- *A State Park is created when a parcel of land is identified as having high conservation value and/or there is imminent danger of an eco-system being degraded.
- *The NPWS has to promptly develop a bushfire management plan that effectively controls fuel build up.
- *A State Park would be characterised as being accessible and interacting with its community in contrast to the 'lock-up' approach of National Parks

A **State Park** cannot be 'elevated' to a National Park unless it satisfies the following criteria -

- NPWS can demonstrate they have the resources (financial and manpower) to manage fires in the proposed Park
- NPWS can prove they have workable strategies for feral flora and fauna control
- NPWS build or plan to build adequate fire breaks between the Park and private property
- There is a very clear and scientifically sound case for locking up the country as a National Park rather a more assessable and community friendly State Park
- It can be proven there is sufficient funding within the NPWS budget now and in the future to manage a new National Park

Creation of a new National Park must be taken out of the hands of the Executive . We suggest the path to a National Park should be public and require the endorsement of the State Parliament. A proposal to create a new National Park should trigger a public request for submissions commenting on the proposal. A Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly should review the submissions of the public, the NPWS, local government, the scientific community and other interested parties. Only after considering these submissions and determining whether the proposed National Park meets the above criteria is a recommendation made to cabinet.

It is hoped the new approach of **State Parks** will bring some scientific rigour to the creation of public estates; give the affected communities more 'ownership' of Parks; minimise the recurrence of wildfires; and ensure we leave a legacy of public estates that are not a burden, but add to the sum of bio-diversity and ultimately the enjoyment of our unique environment.

Scot MacDonald
Chair
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