

Submission No.270

Ms Sophie Panopoulos MP
Federal Member for Indi
117 Murphy Street
Wangaratta
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3677

Dear Sophie

I'm writing this submission about the bushfires that swept through the North East and East Gippsland of Victoria during Summer 2003.

I'm no greenie, just an avid bush user who has been left devastated by the recent bushfires. The impact the bushfires have had on the environment and local communities is pure devastation and is arson at its best. The lack of management by Parks Victoria, DSE, DPI, and of the Victorian Government is absolutely deplorable. The build up of blackberries in all gully systems (Fourteen foot high with stems as thick as your wrists), debris from storms and management neglect, build up of the forest floor as high as four to six feet in most places and dense undergrowth due to the lack of burning off, in many areas of National Parks and State Forests has helped to fuel the fire what has created this devastation.

They lock up areas more and more every year, making more National Parks, closing roads and doing no management except for a few signs here and there, and spraying of blackberries from the main road.

I'm thankful that my property doesn't back onto National Parks. They are the worst neighbours that anyone could wish for.

A sleeping giant (wildfire) awoke with vengeance this summer and when it bolted out of these so called protected areas it has totally destroyed everything in its path that we have been trying to protect. It has been four months since the fire and in all the hot areas where the build up debris and undergrowth there is still no vegetation rejuvenating, there no way our protected mammals and wildlife survived this alive. There are no birds, no tracks from wildlife (except for some introduced species eg. Deer, foxes and wild dogs).

There are still animals and birds including wallabies, kangaroos, koalas and wombats that are severely distressed and burnt that we are still finding wandered dazed through their burnt out environment. **Try telling them its good to be living in a National Park.**

The Victorian Government Environmental Ministers Ms Garbutt and her processor Thwaites, Parks Victoria, DSE and DPI are all accountable for this disaster. **Labour policies destroy the bush and not protect the bush.** Through their lack of management of our public assets and at fire control lines they should be prosecuted and many heads should roll. As a volunteer fire fighter who fought fires at Corryong's and later at Eldorado and Stanley these government agencies were the laughing stock of all CFA volunteers. As a result of the Parks Victoria, DSE, DPI and the Greens all these areas that were burnt are now closed to all public access. **What a Joke.**

The above-mentioned departments have said that because the danger from falling trees, erosion and toxic fumes (signs that were built from treated pines) these are the worst excuses that I have ever heard. What do they think we are, **Stupid?** I certainly think I'm above their intelligence anyway.

I will put forward some of their intelligence shown by these departments. When the Eldorado fire broke out our main fire tanker was at Corryong. We were left with two very old tankers for our protection. These old tankers fought that fire all night without a hiccup. At 8am the next morning at changeover, a delegate of Parks and CFA

hobnobs (Chiefs) told us to get rid of those old tankers because they look bad in front of the cameras. So we did leave the scene and deployed onto private land, out of sight and mind. Two days later the tanker I was deployed on had a chainsaw on board, because none of us was accredited to use them, by their standards, Parks took it off us (I have grew up with one in my hands and I don't need to tell you how dangerous this discission was). Some two hours later we were trapped by fallen trees, we were lucky that one of the locals were out and about on his motorbike. A crew leader, to our advantaged, got a lift with him to his home, got his own chainsaw and vehicle and came back to help us.

Also people from other districts were put in charge of our local CFA volunteers and as shown by the devastation of the fires this failed drastically. We had control centres send us tankers from the Shepparton area, which were 2wd only. If it were locals organising this fire, we would have had 4wd deployed, instead of those vehicles that were deployed that sat idle for six hours because they couldn't get into areas.

Stupidity at its best. These are just some examples of what has happened and I'm sure that you will find hundreds more from other submissions. **I don't need Bracks and his mob telling me what to do.**

Sophie, I hope you and your committee get the chance to have a look at the devastation these government department have done to all the containment lines around the fire's edge. If this there revegetation and rejuvenation then the next fire we have is going to be hell on earth.

The impact the bushfires have had on communities was enormous. My family and I had a month of physical and mental exhaustion cause from the Victorian Labour Government mismanagement. The fear of fighting them and the constant patrols to make sure none of our property was burning will never be forgotten or forgiving. I lost a month income while Parks; DSE and DPI employees all got paid, most on double time. Now I am not whinging, but a lot of their resources were deployed poorly.

These government departments were all well fed and rested.

I can tell you the first four days of the Eldorado fire my family and many more would have been lucky to get twelve hours sleep. You would try to eat and sleep when you could. Have you or your committee ever tried eating or drinking when you are exhausted and full of panic, **you can't.**

I hope that your committee makes a commitment to kick the Victorian Labour government and the greens fair and squarely where the sun doesn't shine with the hope that they will listen to us bush users and not the greens.

Please open our parks and forest so once again we can enjoy our past times.

As of the management of fires Parks, DSE and DPI should keep away from local CFA fire fighters until we need their backup. Not the way it is now when they call us to help them, quite the reverse. As volunteers, when it comes to local knowledge of areas that are under threat of wild fire the locals should be running it not some brain-dead department that have no experience at local level.

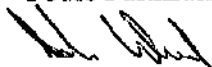
On the management side we should be able to get firewood that is dead, and now burnt on the ground (not the six meters squared) that we are now only allowed. We should be also allowed to collect firewood at any time of the year and not just three months that the departments have allowed us. This is the crap that we have to obey because the government and the greens that live in the city have access to Natural Gas and other cheaper fuels think is adequate. I can tell you now the area that I live in, there is no natural gas and we will never ever get it. So if I need wood and I will go out and get it, when I am ready and I will take as much as I need that is laying on the

ground. I will not be victimised by the Brack's government communist views of what they think I will need to survive a winter and beyond. I implore you to respond to the people and make sure that the public affected by the bush fires are able to manage their land and that of their neighbours (from hell) whether that be parks or state forest and are able to put in containment lines all around their property.

The management of forest over the last two decades by the public and landholders has been great. So lets get rid of Parks Victoria, DSE, DPI and the green lobbyist and bring back one forest management (the old forest commission) and leave the bush to the people that care eg Hunters, bush walkers, wood merchants. 4wd groups, fisherman and any other bush users group except the greens.

Please let me be heard and not just forgotten of this tragedy and devastation of our parks, forest and private land through mismanaged by the Victorian Labour Government.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. O'Brien', written in a cursive style.