

Sub 299



**Commonwealth of Australia
House of Representatives**

**Bush Users Group (BUG) Indigo Region
Bushfire Submission**

MISSION STATEMENT

The Bush Users Group of Victoria is a voluntary organization formed by individuals with an interest in access to and in the use of public land throughout Victoria for recreational and commercial purposes.

Our Mission is to ensure the preservation of and the continued access to public land in Victoria for sustainable recreational and commercial activities for current and future generations.

Our mission is also to ensure that all groups using public land in/or for recreational and commercial purposes respect and, where possible, enhance the environment, historical, traditional and cultural significance of the public lands that they are enjoying.

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FEDERAL BUSHFIRE INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

The origins of conservation are well documented elsewhere, however, for purposes of understanding relevancy of issues, a short description of current dynamics is necessary. Our organisation is fully aware and totally supportive of the need for rational, responsible conservation. However, the purpose of conservation has been corrupted into a power tool asserting jurisdiction without a codified standard of practice allowing a dysfunctional form of conservation to dominate. This fact is of paramount significance to the Inquiry.

CONSERVATION - UNIVERSAL POWER TOOL

Providing unifying precepts on such a vital issue as global and national survival, exploited environmental, political, social and economic concerns as well as greed and built a pervasive network of political influence driven by the notion of collective guilt & cultural censure. It presents ethical & political obligations that nevertheless have to be sensitive to contemporary conditions and events in order to shepherd environmental rescue and deliver mutually beneficial, sustainable co-existence.

Recognition of conservation as a perfect vehicle to simultaneously drive & disguise intent, triggering a symbiosis of political opportunism and a power habituated bureaucracy mutilated conservation.

Precarious State of Land Management

As a result of the pre-eminence given to Non Invasive Conservation - a dysfunctional land use concept that expels human intervention from an area to spontaneously trigger self-organisation and self-complexification of flora, fauna and trees to resurrect the original biodiversity - an environmental disaster has been perpetrated.

Notably, it has degraded what was once a world class system of reserved land which identified and protected areas of exceptional environmental significance but is now reduced to the systemic acquisition of as much land as possible, in order to impose this dysfunctional concept, regardless of its monumental failure to realise environmental goals and oblivious to the proliferation of wildfire, weeds, wild dogs and pests, protected by uncompromising ecofascism - the byproduct of rigid ideology.

Sustained Misuse of The Reserve System Must Be Stopped

Preferably, a five year moratorium should be placed upon any further proclamations of national parks, wilderness areas and marine parks nationwide, until a transparent and comprehensive review of the probity and integrity of recent proclamations in all States and Territories has been conducted to establish if remedial action need be implemented, as and if required, to address inappropriate proclamation and ensure future proclamations are prosecuted without fear or favour to the point of, if necessary, over riding State legislation.

- (a) Implement statutory requirement that State and Territory Park Management Plans be in place before proclamation is declared. eg: absence of Park Management Plans 2002 for Box Ironbark National Parks, Vic. in conjunction with the manipulation of the parliamentary process to guillotine debate and expedite legislation.
- (b) Implement statutory disclosure requirements upon scientific evidence mandated to justify any proposed restrictions on activities arising from declaration of parks.
- (c) Ensure State and Territory Governments have commensurate land management authority as land manager.

Time For A Rethink

A watershed point presents itself whereby collective effort across government to implement necessary controls to ensure sensible, responsible conservation prevails in conjunction with co-existent liveability and does no harm environmentally, economically, socially or culturally and is based on sound, scientific research rather than prejudiced analysis, hostile and impervious to query or challenge.

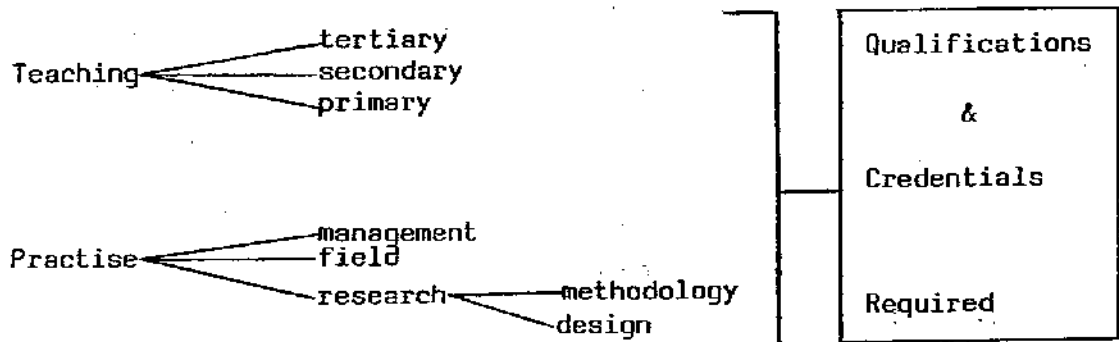
Within conservation and environmental studies there is much research conducted with meticulous care and ethics and responsive to evidence based outcomes but this is not always the case. Where ideology dictates and directs the doctrine of the day it prejudices observation and reporting in the absence of a yardstick for standards of practice, conduct and discipline, producing suspect environmental data that is the basis for allocation of funds, policies and legislation.

NEED FOR ACCREDITATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Accreditation provides the proven mechanism to deliver an enforceable yardstick. Establish in conjunction with:-

- (a) an independent watchdog facility with powers similar to those of the ACCC.
- (b) an office of environmental ombudsman.

ACCREDITATION APPLIED TO



DEPARTMENTAL POLICY SUBJECT TO ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is the yardstick for funding allocation and non compliance invites non allocation. Of extreme importance is the fire fuel reduction management to be quarantined for that purpose only and to be used within the year of allocation to combat chronic deferrment.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS

What passes for community consultation is biased and regional location invites non inclusion in the circuit of proposed meetings only in politically sensitive areas. "Catch Up Consultation" occurs if any of the excluded manage to find out and make strident demands for a meeting in their area

Recurring complaints of data intensive, time poor, suspect justifying research and deaf and blind gatekeeping are consistent, particularly as the general public is only allowed 28 days, even less (see appendix) to comment on what the government has had years, in many cases, to research and prepare.

Consideration has to be given to establishing a code of conduct for public consultation and implementing regulation to ensure quality of justifying research,

quality of equity of consultation, quality of access to pertinent information that quarantining of data does not occur i.e. full disclosure of impacts actually does occur and occur in a timely manner.

Of particular interest is to establish conflict of interest disclosure requirements upon justifying research.

Quality of Research

This is very much an issue of contention. Our experience with the declaration of the Box Ironbark National Parks here was consistant stonewalling of any challenge to the quality of research in support of proposed legislation. Some of which was blatantly inaccurate, incomplete, anecdotal and biased. Driving the preferred legislation home was the all consuming purpose regardless of what would result. Firefuel volume, access for firefighting, fire management issues were relegated to the sideline as the legislation was shoveled through parliament and debate guillotined. Thus the turf to be guarded was enshrined.

The myriad of management problems during the fires are generated in main from the lack of objectivity, suspect methodology and inaccurate data contaminating the justifying research for legislation and regulations.

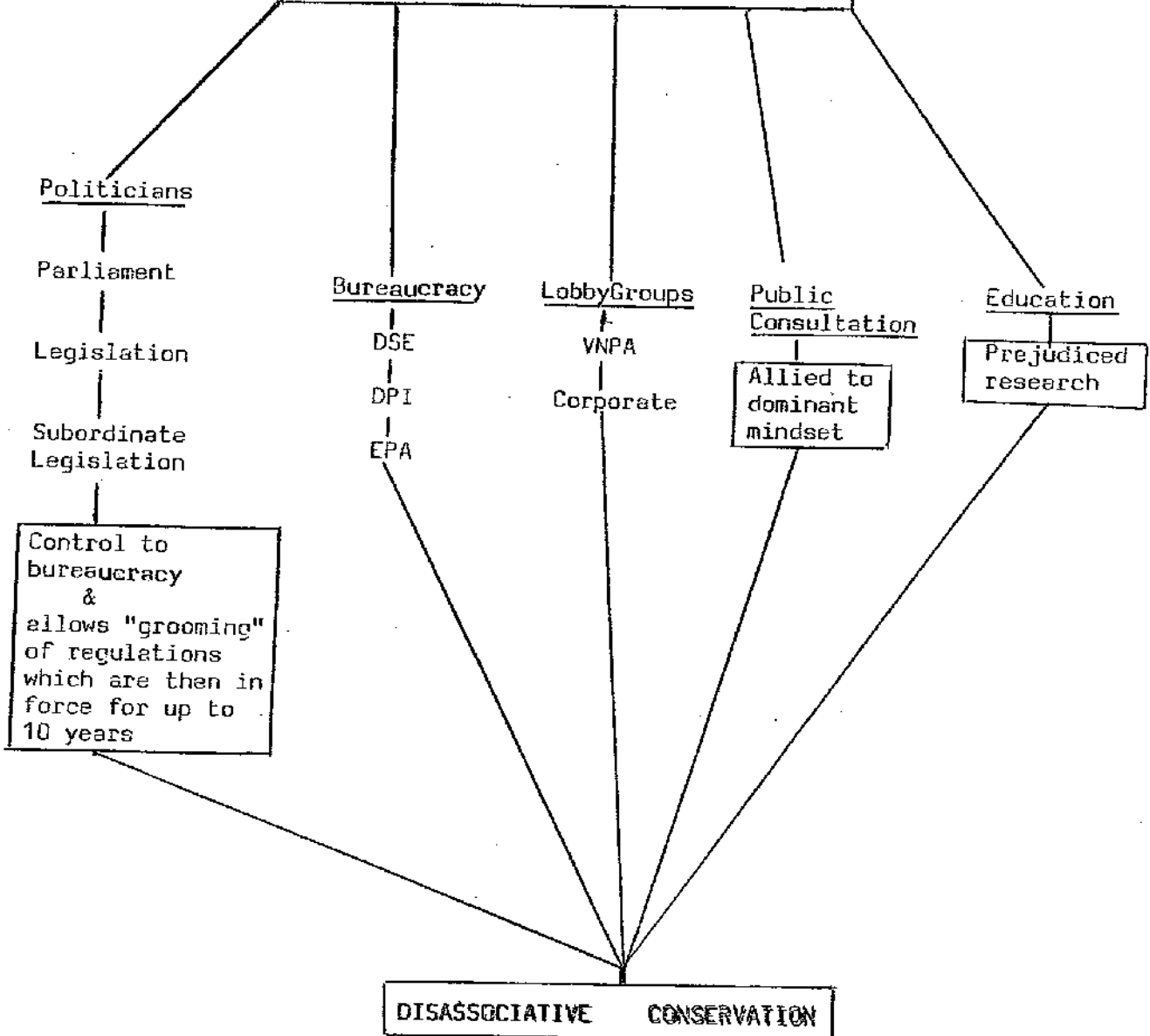
FENCING

Fire devastated park/private boundary reconstruction is being exacerbated by miserable assistance, abrogation of responsibilities by authorities and demanding supervision by cultural advisors with unlimited discretionary powers as well as a non specific fire protection distance requirements, collectively imposes a monumental burden on adjacent landholders. (see Appendix)

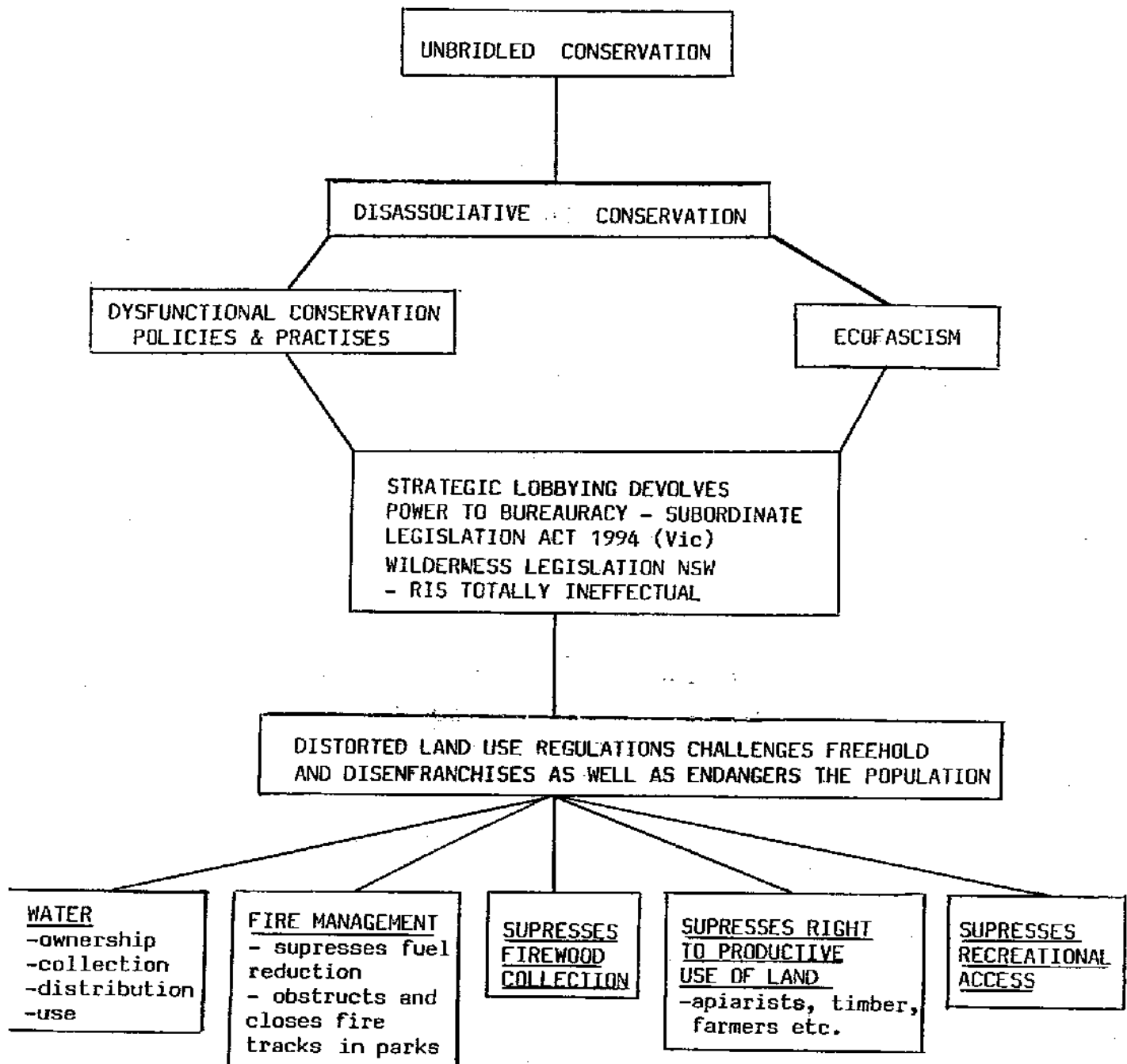
DISSEMINATION OF INFLUENCE

PRIMARY CONTRIBUTING FACTOR

P.R. Conservation resulting from the dominance of a disassociative form of conservation, characterised by an intransigent fixation on belief before knowledge, entirely dismissive of any evidence inconsistent with its own narrow views or goals, producing dysfunctional policies.



EFFECTS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL CONSERVATION - CRITICAL PRIORITY



AGGRAVATED FIREHARM - PRODUCT OF DYSFUNCTIONAL CONSERVATION & MALADMINISTRATION

Dysfunctional land management policies and practises underwrite fire magnitude. Consequently, any recommendations for mitigating strategies is dependant upon recognising pathological aspects of the current form of conservation management which propogates fireharm and inhibits firesmart management.

Accordingly we have devised the following classification and comparative management data.

Comparative Methods:- identifies, compares and contrasts the types of management style derived from differing interpretations of conservation.

Signature Impact:- identifies the quality of characteristics of management style outcomes.

COMPARATIVE MANAGEMENT METHODS

RESPONSIBLE CONSERVATION	DISASSOCIATIVE / FUNDAMENTALIST CONSERVATION
<u>Mindset</u> : Conciliatory & interactive.	<u>Mindset</u> : Adversarial & atavistic.
<u>Impact</u> : Reality based.	<u>Impact</u> : Cultivated perceptions.
<u>Outcome</u> : <u>Defensive</u> - protects and achieves environmental objectives incorporating stakeholder interests.	<u>Outcome</u> : <u>Punitive</u> - imposition of repressive regulations that sacrifices environmental objectives to ideology.
<u>Critical Focus</u> : Therapeutic disturbance is instrumental for biodiversity protection. Complementary input vital.	<u>Critical Focus</u> : Non disturbance is instrumental for biodiversity protection. Discredits complementary input value.
<u>Consultative Process</u> : Balanced, good faith, timely, data specific and stakeholder equity upheld.	<u>Consultative Process</u> : Biased, absence of good faith, data intensive, time poor and syndicated stakeholder selection.
<u>Information Management</u> : Values & incorporates local knowledge and capabilities.	<u>Information Management</u> : Arbitrary dismissal of non aligned, non credentialed contribution.
<u>Research</u> : Evidence based data. Objectively conducted. Error recognised and responded to.	<u>Research</u> : Manipulated by ideologically driven verisimilitude that contaminates credibility of reputable evidence based data.
<u>Data Availability</u> : Timely & pertinent.	<u>Data Availability</u> : Begrudging & tardy.
<u>Legislative & Regulation Utilisation</u> : Conservation defensive & equity sensitive re stakeholders.	<u>Legislative & Regulation Utilisation</u> : Conservation centered, arbitrary, opportunistic & punitive.

Malpractice

The practice of selective firefighting , allowing apparently inconsequential fires to burn unattended without due care for the result and from which harm and/or injury results can be called aggravated fireharm

Similarly, land management decisions that obstruct, or interfere with firefighting containment can also be called aggravated fireharm.

So too was the extended period of exposure to sustained smoke for weeks.

Extended Smoke Exposure A Major Stressor

The trauma conditioning of sustained smoke exposure compounded an already disruptive pattern of events to say nothing of the many personal traumas that have gone unacknowledged.

The aggregate impact of drought, fire, loss and protracted recovery exacerbated by delayed assistance from the State government which other agencies had to fill the breach & when assistance was forthcoming it was a bureaucratic nightmare.

Delayed Assistance

State assistance delayed by when a board is scheduled to sit fails to to meet any criteria for emergency assistance particularly as a period of months was involved. This needs to be addressed.