



**COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

**SUBMISSION TO THE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE  
RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES**

**TO:** Mr Ian Dundas,  
Committee Secretary,  
House of Representatives Select Committee  
on recent Australian Bushfires,  
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**Preamble:**

This Submission was prepared by members of the Country Women's Association of New South Wales with particular input by those in the Monaro or Snowy Mountains region. The members have dealt with the issues using the points set out in the Select Committee's Terms of Reference.

**Submission:**

(a) The socio-economic impact on the local communities, farming and tourist industries, is incalculable - loss of clients to tourism, loss of pastures to farmers, six weeks volunteer work for no pay and loss of income. Recovery rate of Australian bushland and grasslands in Monaro are underrated. Many plants are resistant to fires and have mechanisms for reproduction which are assisted by fires (i.e. smoke and heat). Animals fare less well in such an intense fire as just experienced. Hazard reduction could help provide habitat for animals and reduce fire risk in these areas.

(b) Fire brigades have fire risk plans which provide accuracy in identifying weak spots where the fire would travel. There is also training for members and lots of experience every year with local fires and hazard reduction. NPWS staff lack 'hands-on' experience. Local brigades made a fire trail from Snowy Plains to Kalkite by bulldozing and backburning. They held the trail for five days. NPWS staff came in to relieve and lost the fire in twelve hours through lack of experience.

(c) Kosciusko National Park had only extremely minimal hazard reduction - far too little. Small hazard reduction fires, well controlled, would cause minimal environmental damage, saving the Park from the extremely severe heat of the recent fires. Flying over the Park after the fires it was obvious that anywhere burnt within the last ten years had either escaped or was less severely burnt. At Walmesley's Sanctuary in the Adelaide Hills, because of the ground being free of litter due to marsupials grazing, after a severe fire it was observed that the fire had passed right over the top of the Sanctuary. In the absence of marsupials.....perhaps sheep?

(d) Hazard reduction should be contracted out by Parks and Forestry with planning and an annual budget for this work. Fire is an excellent tool. Phyl Cheney - CSIRO Research Scientist into fires, says burning needs to be more frequent. CSIRO could do a fire regime plan.

(e) Trail management within the Park - there need to be more fire trails for access and these to be kept to a standard for fire trucks (not just 4WD). This work to be budgeted each year and overseen by local Fire Control Officers. Time lost making new trails and upgrading existing ones was extremely costly in the recent fires.

(f) Local Government to require tanks on all houses and trees kept a certain distance away. A complete change of policy should aim to reintroduce practices similar to Aboriginal firestick burning, practices which were also followed by early settlers' fire regimes with much success.

(g) Where Rural Fire Service and NPWS are in areas with local fire brigades, the chain of command should be clarified in order to eliminate confusion and expedite the best plans. Senior Rural Fire Services gave little support to brigades, who have a clearer understanding of terrain and localities.

The local fire control should stay in Berridale. It is in the centre of the Snowy River Shire and land is cheaper. The Centre can be improved and upgraded as necessary without the cost of an expensive new Fire Control Centre in Jindabyne, out of the district centre and where land is expensive. Better consultation with locals would improve relations.

(h) On the whole, sharing was good, but we can improve our backup for local brigades with a co-ordinated village team made up of local service organisations. We did this effectively, on a small scale.

(i) Difficulties were faced due to differences for volunteers when confronted with paid personnel who go home at 5.20 pm in some cases. There must be some way to even out the loss of income for volunteers who fight, often twelve hours and more, and still go home and run a business.

In concluding, I should say that locals with experience and knowledge have often been ignored in the past. The journals and books of pioneers and explorers from earliest contact continually quote the frequency of fires perceived and their journals describe open park-like country dotted with trees and lacking undergrowth. A quote from Louis Pasteur - "Nothing should be neglected and a remark from a rough labourer who does well what he has to do is infinitely precious". Governments ignore at their peril the farmers' expertise and experience.