

**From:** Barry & Gay Upton  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 10 June 2003 11:02 AM  
**To:** Panopoulos, Sophie (MP)  
**Subject:** Federal Government's Bushfire Inquiry  
**To Federal Government's Bushfire Inquiry**

**Ms S. Panopoulos,  
Federal Member For Indi**

RESUME OF SOME FIRES CAUSED BY LIGHTNING STRIKES AND OTHER SOURCES IN  
THE NARIEL VALLEY AS FROM 8<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2003.

18<sup>th</sup> January a meeting of Nariel Valley residents was held at Carmody's reserve

Present were most of the residents together with Nariel Valley CFA Captain, Mr Bruce Whitsed, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Mr Terry Bailey and Communications officer Mr. Greg Nankervis together with a Mr. Graeme Healey from the CFA. He was not in any uniform – only had on a name badge.

It appeared that Mr. Healey was to be spokesman for the meeting. He showed a map and indicated that the control lines being aimed at were Dunstan's Logging road (north edge) to Wheelers Logging track (south edge) connected along the west by Benambra road and to the Murray River. It was intimated that this would be the extent of the fire. He informed the meeting that we were going to see the biggest fire of our lifetime as all that area was to be burnt. We were given time to inspect the maps but local input as to conditions etc was brushed aside. (Assumed not to have gone to university to learn about fire fighting, locals do not know what to do in these circumstances.)

Current status of fires was given. Almost verbatim of what was said at the Corryong town meeting. Appeared to say a lot, but not really much constructive information.

Dozers were everywhere putting in the famous "containment lines". Again local knowledge of the dozers boys did not seem to be listened to. Most of these lines did not appear to hold.

A line was done from way above our neighbour's property through to Dunstan's track (north end) – approx 4-5 kms. When the fire was coming down the hill behind us, slowly, we were told that it would be patrolled regularly throughout the day. One vehicle was seen at 10.30 a.m. only. The wind changed direction during the afternoon. About 5 p.m. I saw a large hot spot on the line in next door's paddock, and called for the Nariel Valley trailer tanker. We damped down this potential hazard and the local crew and tanker arrived. They were happy to stay and watch for further outbreaks, but were ordered home. I asked that several other dangerous trees be cut down, but was told CFA are not allowed to use chainsaws! Fortunately these trees did not crown. I was also basically abused for "interfering". A DSE vehicle finally arrived about 7-7.30 p.m. A vehicle patrolled occasionally throughout the night.

I am quite appalled at the manner in which this whole situation was controlled. It was frequently stressed that the safety of all personnel was of a primary concern. However, talking to crews from away that were filling at the QF (Quick Fill Pump) outside our gate, NONE had a local with them. Some of these volunteers (and the DSE) came from flat areas of the State and elsewhere and their lives were at risk because of this lack. They had no experience of our terrain or weather conditions.

10/06/2003

When asked, it was denied that Carmody's Track was a back burn. The updates say differently.

DSE had trouble lighting back burns (told by locals this would happen – still good dew at night) but they persisted and managed to set the whole area ablaze. As seen by "Updates" the areas burned became enormous and extremely dangerous to everyone involved.

DSE personnel were asked NOT under any circumstances to burn on the west side of the Nariel Valley, particularly the Upper Nariel area. However, this was done with the result being a firestorm that blasted through ten properties, five of these being occupied by eleven people plus several CFA personnel. By the grace of God there were no lives lost. We will remember Australia Day 2003 for a long time.

I personally frequently told DSE personnel about our local wind conditions and was not believed. These people found out the hard way that what they were told was not bull..... You can stand in our backyard (and this happened often during the emergency) and have the wind coming at you from the North and a few feet higher up the hill it is coming from the South. Majority of evenings the wind will turn to the South/South-west between 7.30 – 8.30 p.m. This meant that any fire south of us would be heading in our direction. Not believed, of course.

The hierarchy of the Government departments that came to our area should have listened to local knowledge and then we might not have had such a disaster.

Further information available if required,

Sincerely J. Kohlman

**From: JOHAN KOHLMAN,**