

Sub 62



The Secretary,
House of Representatives Select Committee on Recent Australian Bushfires.
Dear Sir,

Individual Submission

Clarification of Roles, Responsibilities, Authorities & Potential Liabilities for Fire Mitigation.

Submitter

This is submitted as a individual land owner residential in a wilderness "one in three years" Council rated bush fire zone with State & Council land surrounding the property. I am also a volunteer Rural Fire Brigade member on the Noosa North Shore.

The recent destructive nature of the wild fires in South East New South Wales, particularly around Canberra, have focused concerned residents' attention of what activities our local Rural Fire Brigade might be able to initiate in order to mitigate such a similar event occurring in our area.

Indeed, this matter would be of interest to many Rural Fire Brigades where residential zones interface with expanses of natural bush land. Our region has residential acreage imbedded in State Government land reserves including National Parks and Local Council controlled land.

Issue.

Our investigations have indicated a lack of any legally defined role for any agency, Federal, State, Local Council or Rural Fire Services for Wild bushfire mitigation. As far as we can ascertain there is no one entity responsible for developing a fire minimisation strategy for our area which integrates all stakeholders, implementation of plans or audit of effectiveness of preventative actions.

Some fire prevention activities are undertaken by the National Parks but in the past have been well intended but with limited funding. Overall fire prevention appears fragmented, inadequate, prone to vested interest agendas, inadequately funded in past years and severely restricts an individual from taking adequate due diligence fire preventing actions because of local council vegetation Management policies. Any initiatives appear through mutual co-operation between personalities of different entities which may or may not continue effectively. Individual land owners have almost no rights to take action without deferring to discretionary judgments of Government third parties.

Wild bushfire does not respect geographical authority legal boundaries!

Suggested Recommendation

One Authority be specified as having the role, responsibilities, skills & resources and authorities for integration of all government and volunteer organizations with the objective of implementing necessary strategies for preventing and fighting wild bushfires such body being independent from vested interest pressure groups, suitably funded and audited for effectiveness.

This could be a State Controlled Emergency Fire Services extended mandate.

In investigating a solution for this issue, we would appreciate your recommending the following:-

1...A clear expanded role for our Rural Fire Brigade with respect to reducing the risk of wild fires for the protection of life & property with defined responsibilities and authorities and funding within the overall integrated strategy.

2...Specifying authorities in achieving the above responsibilities including but not limited to:-

Access to and right to back burn and/or clear breaks etc on

a)...private land

b)..Council Land

c).. State Government land including National Park.

Enforcing responsible management of necessary fire access tracks and buffer/back burn zones and fire fuel risk reduction.

Enforcing fire prohibitions

3...Defining contingent liability for:-

a).. us as a volunteer Rural Brigade in our activities e.g. training, fire risk mitigation, fire fighting, loss of life, injury and loss /damage of property of all stakeholders and

b) Local & State Government bodies who dictate Rural Vegetation Management policies particularly on restricting rural resident's ability to mitigate fuel risks for their own property protection.

4...Elimination of conflict of interests where, say, Local Councils and State Government bodies with a Vegetation Conservation Management agenda are also specifying what vegetation is to be dealt with for fire mitigation.

It is desirable that we identify what we can do now rather than have to wait for public opinion, litigation and/or a coroner's court to allocate shortcomings which we, as a community, have the ability to address now.

Yours Sincerely,

Graham Bruce Clelland