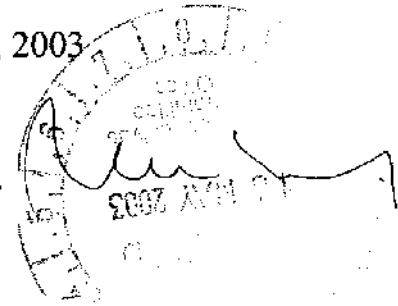


Bushfire Review

May 9, 2003

Submission by:
Christine Litchfield

Submission No.217



Dear Sir/Madam

I am concerned about DSE's Fuel Reduction Burning 'policy **and** practice' and urge the minister to take a considered and intelligent appraisal of the situation. I offer the following points:

- There is **no** evidence that fuel reduction burning is effective in reducing wildfire risk
- A wildfire is unstoppable in hot and windy conditions – there is ample evidence that wildfire has burned through areas of forest that were burned previously as part of fuel reduction programs.
- Fuel Reduction burns are dangerous in themselves – the recent Cobaw Forest fire is a prime example – there are plenty of others – of Fuel Reduction burns that become wildfires.
- Fuel Reduction burns kill wildlife. When they get out of control the toll on wildlife is horrendous. If I put my dog in a kennel and set fire to the kennel, I would be prosecuted under the cruelty to animals act and would be thought of as a 'monster'. When DSE set a patch of forest on fire – they are burning alive countless animals in their habitat– a cruel and painful death. Those of us who have nursed burned animals from wildfires know exactly just how cruel this is.
- Wildlife is never considered in DSE's fire prevention policies – only people and property. Even in press reporting of bushfires the plight of wildlife is usually ignored. If there was evidence that Fuel Reduction Burning did mitigate the severity of wildfires, there *might* be some argument that burning alive animals in the designated patch is justified by the potential saving of many more, however, given that there is no evidence that this is the case, there is no justification for it.
- DSE's fire officers Lee Gleeson and John Saunders have both stated openly that Fuel Reduction Burns will not be supervised at night. This policy is unacceptable. If the recent Fuel Reduction Burn in the Cobaws had been supervised at night it may well have been controlled before its disastrous escape. No one else in the community would leave a fire unattended – especially in a forest – there is simply no excuse for this – it is criminal.
- Clean ups – dozing and small patches of fuel reduction burning around town perimeters and property boundaries is a sensible response to bushfire threat. Wholesale burning in forests is pointless, destructive and expensive and should stop.
- There is some understandable hysteria in rural communities traumatised by the horrendous fires in the North East – The minister *must* resist the cry for *more* fuel reduction burns in forests. The facts about the ineffectiveness of broad scale Fuel Reduction Burning should be presented clearly to these communities and money spent on real protection measures – eg. More 'Elvis' sky cranes – (fantastic equipment) – funding / subsidies to communities for individual fire units – if more of us have a portable water tank and fire pump and hose that we can throw on the back of the Ute or trailer, then many fires will be quashed before they got a hold.
- The policy of not attacking fire in forests – letting them burn out to towns / properties should be questioned. It seems that there were instances in Gippsland where the fire was left to 'trickle along' when it could have been actively fought – perhaps another example of the 'bush and animals are expendable' thinking.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.
Chris Litchfield