

SUMMARY FOR BUSHFIRE SUBMISSION
W. Morgan



Submission No.261

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BUSHFIRE SUBMISSION: for Ms Win Morgan

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE RE-FIRES 1985 & 2003:

The original property belonging to my parents purchased 55 years ago, of 300 acres which backed onto the new Box-Ironbark national park on the Chiltern /Beechworth road. My father was a wood merchant he cleared 2 thirds of his land and left 1 third in its natural state as a gift to the environment.

In 1985 we watched the timbered area decimated by fire and almost burn our new home. We had done hazard reduction and were careful about what we planted around our home. The fire came over the hill from Woolshed /Eldorado, as did the 2003 fire. No longer my home, it was in extreme danger again in January 2003 as the new owners had more hazardous growth close to the home and other burnable material close by. This year's fire burnt, as did the 1985 fire all the boundary fences. The neighbors lost, machinery, sheds, fruit trees and pasture in the 2003 fires as did dozens of other neighbors. Their land for the most part adjoins Public land or Council roads. Twice in 18 years have boundaries had to be replaced with no monetary input from the Government for their share of the cost.

PERSONAL TRAUMA:

During the fires in January 2003 which raged all over Victoria, my family and I were traumatized for weeks. My son and his family live at Eskdale and during the fires from the Eldorado area, (which were the ones that we were in danger from) he left his home to be with me and his elderly Grandmother knowing that when he got home maybe his own home would have been decimated. This is one story. The fires around the Mitta Mitta , Dartmouth, Tallangatta Valley were to

burn for another 3 weeks and in all that time he could not leave his property for fear that they would have to fight for everything they owned and maybe even their lives. They were told by the authorities not to expect help, as it may not be available, due to the stretching of facilities, due to the extent of the fires.

They were in a state of emotional trauma day and night for three weeks not knowing from which direction the fires might come as they were all around them. My son had 3 weeks off work, unpaid, just to be there to try and save everything they owned. Hundreds of people were in this position. Many friends of mine who live in the Alpine areas were in grave danger and this was a great concern to me. The position we were in was, how could you leave to help anyone many miles away when your own properties are under threat. The emotional and financial costs were astronomical.

EXISTING TRACKS NOT MAINTAINED:

In 1985 tracks were made around the perimeter of our properties and we were assured that they would be kept open for fire fighting purposes. Of course this did not happen so 18 years on a new environmental disturbance happened by the services responsible for saving our homes and properties. Bulldozers made new tracks, pushing down more trees to do so. If fire tracks were kept open and maintained, specifically around properties where 100 meters should be cleared as a buffer zone, this unnecessary environmental impact would be eliminated.

TRACK CLOSURES:

Track closures by the D.S.E ARE IN MANY CASES A RECIPE FOR DISASTER. Not far from my home an example of this is, the entrance at one end of the track was deep ripped and a huge tree pushed over it, at the other end a few hundred meters from the

entrance it was closed off. Had anyone been trying to escape and gone up the other end and found the track closed it could have meant a death or more. Interestingly around the time of the fires in the Eldorado/Woolshed area the track was opened. We had had input into the danger before the fires about this type of heinous practice.

Existing tracks around our properties and in the bushlands have been closed, and even with the lobbying to have them opened and available to fire crews, the D.S.E in a bloody minded quest have gone on closing them off in as many as about 80% in the Chiltern Iron-Bark National Park. Many locals called in politicians and we did get some opened, however this is all to stop access to public land, by the Green very selfish minority.

INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT:

Non intervention as advocated by the Greens has proven to be an ineffective way to manage public land. The 'lock up lock out' mentality is part of the cause for the disaster we have all been through in the fires. Locking out graziers, locking out sustainable timber milling, locking out eucalyptus distillers, locking out beekeeping, locking out, firewood users and recreational users. If you lock up a house and have no human intervention, the rats the white ants, the spiders, etc take over and this applies to our Public land. Vermin will thrive in undergrowth and weeds and then become a private land issue.

THE ROADSIDE ON THE CHILTERN/BEECHWORTH ROAD:

The roadside on the Chiltern/Beechworth road is a huge concern for residents, South of the new Chiltern/Pilot national park there is tons of hazardous material, which would burn extremely hot, and not had a reduction burn in years. As residents we are not allowed to clean this up as we used to in years gone by. This is a catastrophe waiting

to happen. We have urged the Indigo shire to do something about it but little has been done. It was good luck that during the January fires a new front didn't come up from the roadsides, had this happened we would surely have lost private property.

OBSERVATIONS RE- HAZARD REDUCED LAND:

Personal observations after this years fires were that the land on our original place that had burned in 1985 was a slower less consuming fire than it was on the North Eastern side as much of it had not been burned in many many years and was decimated. It proved that even after 18 years it still helped to retard the progress of the fires. So one would expect that regular mosaical burns would have a useful effect on the regression of fire.

RESOURCES TO MANAGE PUBLIC LAND:

It is absolutely essential that the Government make funds available for the management of Public Land. Speaking to a few Parks people they say 'we do not have the funds to manage the land as it should be. If the money these fires cost had been put into land management then we would not have seen the decimation that occurred. Fire is merely a symptom of a wider more fundamental issue; parks require a level of management that is economically unsustainable.

Properly regulated commercial and recreational activities in public land could be better used to manage environmental outcomes than are currently possible.

COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY:

The C.F.A was regarded as the angels of mercy in 1985, we would surely have lost our home our stock and who knows what else if it

weren't for them. In the January fires great comfort came when we saw our local and away C.F.A volunteers come to the call. These people know no fear when on the job. They do have an exceptional talent for the most part, they are local, or do have locals with them or do listen to locals. Something has to be changed to allow the C.F.A to be the prime managers of all firefighting. The lack of confidence in the D.S.E makes us very frightened about future fire control under their jurisdiction. You cannot control a fire on a 9 to 5 basis, and this appears to have happened with D.S.E in many areas, unfortunately fire has no conscience, similar to our Bracks Government and other ignorant Governments.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:

When the B.I.B. was going through we begged MS Garbutt and the Bracks government to come and meet with the locals and discuss the fire issues, we were treated like peasants and ignored and are still being ignored. Vast and valuable local knowledge is ignored by the Government and park management.

ENVIRONMENTAL VANDALISM:

Hundreds of huge solid trees have been sacrificed and vandalized to stop the progress of these fires and not one can be salvaged for firewood because of national parks, greens and bloody-minded governments. In an area where the miscalculation of available firewood has left residents with insufficient for the next year let alone the future, this is environmental idiocy.

NOT MINORITY OWNERSHIP:

This inquiry must look at local situations, listen to locals and not be swayed by the smooth talking greens who see any intervention in our bush as illegal and immoral. We are the guardians of the bush, we live in it, we care for it, and it belongs to all of us, not a minority group.

MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND:

If we must have Parks manage our land then be it on their backs to do it in a responsible common sense manner, instead of the hit and miss it is at present. D.S.E is totally ignorant of the real fire issues.

If the Stretton Royal Commission recommendations had been implemented in full we would not have had the horrendous problems that came with these fires. It appears we have not learnt anything from that inquiry.

A.P.C. Morgan