

A SUBMISSION

IN REALTION TO THE BUSHFIRES IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY

8<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY TO 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2003

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> March 2003

I make this submission in relation to the Fires that burnt in the A.C.T from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2003 and summarise as follows:

Point One : The intensity and resultant fire storm/ tornados were a result of excessive fuel loads (burden) within the National Park and were not a natural occurrence.

Point Two : The fires started by lightning on the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. Nothing was done in an attempt to extinguish the fires for days.

Point Three: I had assistance from 3 N.S.W tankers one hour before the fire front hit but these disappeared without notice before the fire hit. We were left to burn.

I will also make comment on:

- Minister Stanhope's attempt to protect individuals
- An attempt to shift the start of the fires on one burning in N.S.W

Signed,



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R.N Mack  
28<sup>th</sup> March 2003

### **Point One:**

The 1998 Bushfire Fuel Management Plan, a document that is voluminous, insincere and lacking in effective planning, advocates that excessive fuel loads should be managed as follows, removal by hand of offensive debris, slashing around areas of significance and buildings and fuel load reduction only when the levels exceed 15 Ton per hectare.

My observations and comments are subjective but scientific evidence must exist to prove that the fuel load levels were far in excess of those in '98 Plan. It was as a direct result of these fuel loads that the fires created their own energy, wind, heat and the eventual disaster that hit us and then Canberra.

It was not a natural occurrence. There were contributing factors such as the drought, but it was the blatant mismanagement of National Park and a DO NOTHING Management Plan, and it is a disgrace to those involved and they should be ashamed of themselves. Four of us were nearly killed as a result of that fire. It was the most terrifying event I have ever witnessed. Many of us still re-live the event and continue to be affected by it.

### **Point Two:**

The lightning that started the 3 spot fires hit at approximately 2pm on Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. On Thursday morning, the 9<sup>th</sup>, I awoke to an ABC Radio report that the fires in the Brindabella Ranges were all less than a hectare in size and being "monitored". The report also stated that fires were "a natural occurrence".

It was peak summer, unusually dry and blind Freddy knew about the excessive fuel loads. It was the decision of the CFCO, Peter Lucas Smith, what to do with that fire. It burnt for days with very little being done, other than monitor them. Helicopters could have been used to extinguish them because of the difficult terrain they were in and the minimal size of them. I consider this an act of negligence and is a clear breach of bushfire management policy.

4 to 5 days later the fires had taken hold and the only way they could have been extinguished was substantial rainfall. Without that happening it was then only a matter of time. As I told all my neighbours, "its not a matter of if, it's a matter of when".

### Point Three:

My property consists of 2 residences, machinery shed and shearing shed. We had our own rural units on site and had prepared as well as our experience had taught us. How little we knew.

We had been promised by our Fire Captain, Robert Flint, that each property in the valley would have at least one tanker and one light unit on site for protection of property. On the day of the fire various units came and went but eventually 3 NSW tankers arrived at lunchtime. We watched the fire burn down the Corin Dam Road as the skies darkened. Those 3 units left us without saying a word, at approx. 1-1.15pm. I was not happy with this as my hopes were high of being able to save all the buildings. Little did we know that one hour later we would be fighting for our lives and I could not have cared less if all the buildings had burnt so long as the 3 other men helping me, (all volunteers) survived for the sake of their wives and families. We were left to burn and die as a result of a decision to withdraw those NSW tankers.

### Comments:

Minister Stanhope has been quick to protect both Lucas Smith and Mr Castle stating clearly that they did all they could to stop the fires. This naivety is astounding. The natural process of an inquiry following the fires should be allowed to take its course without influence from a politician.

It is therefore I will be supporting the Federal inquiry into the fires. As has been previously stated, how can the ACT Government conduct an inquiry into its own management practices and be impartial. Any local government inquiry would be the biggest cover up report ever, protecting all, blaming no one and putting the fire down to "a natural phenomenon".

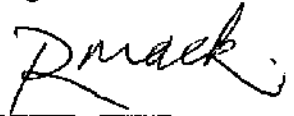
And further

There has been a recent attempt to blame the intensity of the fire on a fire coming from Broken Cart fire trail in NSW that burnt on the same day. This attempt is to draw away the issue of mismanagement of fuel loads within the ACT and therefore take away responsibility of the fire from National Park management and would then enable ESB to point fingers and lay blame elsewhere, other than where it really lies. The Broken Cart Fire had no influence on ours!

I witnessed first hand the Corin Dam fire, as it burnt down the valley and I saw exactly what happened when the fire burnt into the pines. The intensity increased, the smoke changed from cloudy to dark brown and it started to generate a swirling, circling vortex that belted us with intense heat, debris, wind

that created sensory deprivation, I did not know which way was up or down. The wind blew the windows of the cottage in, then it caught fire, it tore down my shearing and machinery sheds and deposited the iron between 500m to 1km away. What was lost and what happened is documented else where but I will stand and appear before any inquiry, tribunal, court and defend what I have written and I will defend it until the day I die.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Mack', written over a horizontal line.

R. Mack  
28/03/03