

*Committee Secretary
Select Committee In Recent Bushfires
Parliament House
Canberra.*

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RE : Fire Management in Goobang National Park

We wish to make a submission to you regarding bush fires in NSW as far back as 1998 and in particular fires in the Goobang National Park. We are both captains of brigades bordering Goobang National Park and have accumulated approximately 70 years of service between us in and around the Park

In this time we have witnessed the unpleasant job of fire fighting made even more unpleasant by bureaucratic high handedness, arrogance and huge waste of taxpayers money.

The fire in the southern end of Goobang in 1998 was in control of Group Captain Barry Gibson when without prior warning; he and his brigade were told their services were no longer required. The fire was then taken over by Rural Fire Service (RFS) hierarchy, and without any local knowledge and experience carried out procedures which allowed the fire to escape containment lines.

We saw what was virtually a mirrored situation in December 2001, in our area of the same National Park, which is on the northern most boundary of the Goobang Park. Where a fire lit by lightning was declared a section 44, this fire was brought under control and left to be patrolled by National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS). Through failing to do this job properly, the fire escaped by spotting over. A new section 44 declared under NPWS and RFS incompetent management, turned into a disaster for surrounding landholders.

The disaster, caused by a massive outbreak from a large backburn ordered by NPWS and RFS hierarchy, 50 kilometres away, which our group captains and brigade members were strongly against.

A further example of this arrogance and incompetence was demonstrated in February 2003 when a Fire Control Officer (FCO) in phone contact with a Superintendent 50 kilometres away, took control of a fire away from a local brigade Deputy Captain. The fire at that stage covered an area of four acres. Instead of securing a bulldozer to build a track to allow tankers access, the FCO (under instructions) ordered a 3 kilometre back burn, setting fire to approximately 600 acres. Consequently the larger fire escaped burning out thousands of acres of timber, pastures and fencing. If it wasn't for the diligence of local volunteer fire fighters, much more country and many houses would have been lost.

Considering the above examples and those of similar magnitude from dozens of brigades all over NSW, we would like you to consider the following points we feel are relevant towards a more :

- ❖ Efficient system of not only fire fighting but fire avoidance due to fuel reduction and forward planning.

- ❖ The disclosure of cover ups of bureaucratic bungling and eventual white wash of ridiculous fire fighting decisions made by NPWS and RFS hierarchy against local experienced fire fighters advice.
- ❖ The misconception by the general public as to the actual power of a Coroners inquiry into fires and the lack of authorities not taking heed of Coroners recommendations.
- ❖ That the control of a fire be at the fire ground so as the people in control can make decisions with full knowledge of prevailing conditions. Not someone in an office 50-100 kilometres away, who in most cases has no fire fighting expertise to utilise.
- ❖ Destruction of bio diversity (nature and threatened species of flora and fauna and extreme erosion) in horrific wildfires which could have been avoided by hazard reduction and forward planning.
- ❖ Reduction of empire building bureaucrats wasting taxpayers' money on offices and office positions in an already top heavy management regime.
- ❖ Disclosure of what appears to be a hidden agenda of (RFS) hierarchy where by a small fire is allowed to increase in size or be increased in size (a tactic no doubt to help justify their existence). Thus totally disregarding the safety and valuable time of volunteers.
- ❖ More heed be taken of warnings issued by accredited fire fighters, as to fuel loads and pending disasters in the event of wild fires. Such warnings foretold by Kurt Lance to the state parliamentary inquiry after the Christmas fires of 2001, and the warnings issued by Bal Jefferies of Thawa as to the consequence if nothing was done to curtail recent fires in the Brindabella Ranges, (no heed taken and Canberra burned) .
- ❖ Provision of water storage dams within National Parks for use of wildlife and fire fighting purposes instead of relying on adjoining landholders supply
- ❖ We need to take the politics out of RFS or any emergency service, so that there is no hidden agenda.
- ❖ RFS needs to be free of salaried staff in the association, so there is no conflict of interest. You can't serve two masters. There can be no other way.
- ❖ Implement a single overall National Park bushfire management plan for each park made in consultation with RFS, local group captains, captains, brigades, and neighbouring landholders.
- ❖ The NSW Labor Government and "Green" groups are too closely aligned, with environmental concerns coming before people's lives, property, animals, and threatened species. The environmental movement seems to have power over all.
- ❖ We do not believe that the NPWS should have any authority at fires on their land because it is not in their interest to extinguish the fire due to double pay issues. Why should they be on double pay?
- ❖ The other issues are RFS Volunteers on the fire front need authority over NPWS, whether in a Section 44 declaration or not.
- ❖ The fact that local knowledge is not used in fire situations where it would be beneficial that local knowledge is used.
- ❖ Group captains, captains, and volunteers in consultation with NPWS, should advise them what is required in the park in relation to fire trails, dimensions of breaks and trails, and hazard reduction burns.
- ❖ Premier Carr said there are 350 National Parks in NSW. What about the fire management plans for each park?? They should not be allowed to operate without them.

