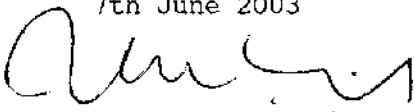


Telephone 03 5229 0229

7th June 2003



11 June 03

The Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No.402

Dear Sir/Madam,

As a result of my letter to The Prime Minister of Australia regarding recent bushfires, The Hon Wilson Tuckey MP has directed that I forward my suggestions for fire-fighting to your Committee; in consequence, I do so hoping they will be considered. I am confident adoption of them will provide protection to built-up areas when such emergencies exist.

I appreciate this opportunity to submit my suggestions regarding a modern approach to fire-fighting, which would involve C130 Hercules aircraft. I also wish to update my original letter regarding water storage in the aircraft, by using a quick change-over mobile unit fitted with pumps to control the output over a given area: the only reason I suggested poly fuel bags in my earlier letter was because of the urgency at that time, particularly around Canberra, Omeo, Bright, etc. I was fairly sure it was unlikely that alternative containers would have been available at such short notice.

In order to achieve complete success we must firstly update our thinking and planning in critical areas. This would involve C130 aircraft working in pairs - one to lay a co-ordinated path along the fire front to assist ground fire units, and a second to lay an adjacent path behind the fire fighters, thus controlling sparks, burning embers, etc. to a great degree and reducing the risk of fresh outbreaks. It should be noted that two C130 aircraft working in this capacity would be the equivalent of a heavy shower of rain over a widely-populated area. It would also be of great assistance to those who stayed behind to protect their property with limited resources.

Small fixed-wing aircraft are useful but, as I said in my original letter, they are only a "drop in the bucket" when compared with the massive C130 load. Helicopters are limited to a confined dump area and are lacking in a wide-spread approach; however, they would be most valuable supplementing wide-spread drenching carried out by the C130s.

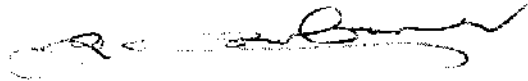
The above plan could be even more effective if a second pair of C130s could be available to come on target when the original pair had exhausted their load, thus enabling them to return to base, where loaded mobile containers could be quickly driven into the Hercules via the rear ramp. Furthermore, where heavy smoke covers the target areas, C130 aircraft have radar which could cover these areas, whereas light aircraft do not and their situation becomes extremely dangerous despite their wonderful contribution to the effort.

I also wish to add that, in 1950/51/52, I was conducting bushfire control and reporting direct to Forestry from RAAF Base East Sale using Dakota aircraft. In later years, after retirement, I was evacuated from my farm at Nayook (Victoria) during the massive 1983 fires. I have seen the need for better control from both the air and the ground.

My only other attempt to express my thoughts to authority was when I suggested to Control Traffic Policy Section how a radar gun could be used to control traffic. I still have the 1975 reply from Inspector Oakes on behalf of the then Assistant Commissioner, Mr Newell, supporting the idea. I was associated with radar on Catalina, Liberator, Lancaster, Lincoln, Neptune, Sabre and Mirage aircraft during my RAAF service of over thirty years, and knew it would work, as has proven to be the case.

I am sure my plan with C130 aircraft would be simple. We already have the C130 aircraft and they would not require modification to incorporate mobile water storage units. I am 83 years-old now and must admit that writing my thoughts on paper is my weakest link. However, I ask that my suggestion be seriously considered and added to if necessary. I would always be available to explain any matters in more detail as I confidently feel this approach would save not only properties but valuable lives as well.

Yours faithfully,



Ray Cowburn

Squadron-Leader R H Cowburn (Rtd)