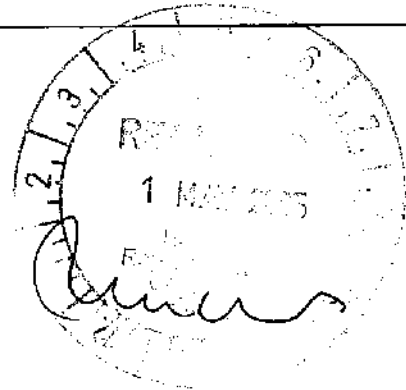


Committee Secretary
House Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires

Submitted by: COLIN RICHARDSON

Address:



Date: 28 / 4 / 2003

INQUIRY INTO RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to make the following submission to the bushfire inquiry.

MAIN POINTS

1. Proliferation of houses in forested areas.
2. Lack of urgency in dealing with fires in inaccessible terrain.

1. During the last 30 years I have observed a steadily increasing number of private houses being built in or on the edge of forested land in the Buckland and Upper Ovens Valleys. Some of this development is taking place on what I would assume to be Crown Land. There was a time when a condition of buying a bush block was that it would have to be cleared. This is obviously no longer the case.

Many of these properties are only accessible by a single unsealed road which goes through the native bush. In a worst case situation, these widely scattered properties would absorb enormous fire-fighting resources and involve great risk to the fire-fighters. It is not logical to allow this sort of development in this, or any other, bushfire prone area. The Alpine Shire, which should be the controlling authority, has a vested interest in allowing any development which will increase its rate base.

2. When dry lightning strikes started the fires in January, the general consensus seemed to be that most of them were burning in remote and inaccessible country and were not threatening

private property. This was followed by 3 to 4 weeks of mostly calm wind conditions which allowed severe smoke pollution to develop,

It would have been preferable, in hindsight, to attack these fires with air dropped incendiaries to burn them out into open country where they could be dealt with more directly. I believe that the weather conditions were suitable for this sort of approach early on during the fires, but the lack of visibility prevented it.

There must be some way of mounting an aerial attack on a bushfire in extremely poor visibility, after all, there will always be a lot of smoke. Aircraft capable of operating in any conditions can reach remote areas far more quickly than ground based resources. Given the extreme dryness of the whole country, it was not a good enough strategy to leave fire burning and hope for the best.

As it turned out, the failure of early containment resulted in a far more widespread fire when the weather became less favourable.

SIGNED

L. J. Richardson
