

My wife and I own 960 acres at Sandy Flat, just south of the lightning strike that started the fire now referred to as the McIntyre fire. Our place was totally burnt; we lost our home, machinery, fencing and pine plantation.

Our area, including McIntyres Hut, came to be known as the Charlie Sector.

It took my family and friends more than 18 years of hard labour to build and cultivate our rural setting. It was our home, our primary producing property, our lifestyle and our future. We invested in our farm for retirement.

Initially, our property was a weed infested, overgrown property. All riverbanks were densely lined with blackberries. We removed the weeds, ploughed and sowed the grazing country, replanted extensively along the riverbanks that had eroded. We cleared the debris from the riverbanks.

One might say it was an idyllic property, isolation and tranquillity with a mass of native animals. There was a multitude of birds that we fed constantly: king parrots, spine bills, kookaburras, kingfishers, parjulets and lyrebirds. There was a strong population of animals, readily visible at any time of the day.

The river contained water rats and platypus and the river was a pristine stream. Our neighbour on the eastern side of the river was the Brindabella National Park at a distance of approximately three kilometres. We are now left with charred remains, very little wild life, as small population of birds, a few wombats and a couple of wallabies.

We are all aware that the Australian bush has a history of fire and it is something that we live with. However, I believe that this fire was managed incompetently. The Brindabella National Park and the Kosciusko national park were poorly prepared. There was little or no fire reduction activities carried out in our immediate areas.

The fire should not be explained by referring to 'exceptional climatic conditions'. The fire should be blamed on poor management prior to and during the burn. In my opinion, the management of the fire in our area was appalling. The inadequate resource allocation and apathetic interest shown from the first day of the lightning strike and following days of burning is inexcusable.

Wednesday 8 January 2003

Please read wife's statement annex A

After leaving Canberra and travelling through Coppins Crossing I was surprised to see flames on the horizon to the west of Canberra. I rang the Fire Service and spoke to a senior member Neil Donahue about it.

I then continued to our place. Driving through the Brindabellas I could see flames to the north. I rang the Fire Controller, getting him from bed. Over the next 36 hours I made 12 phone calls to Fire Control. I was extremely concerned about the weather conditions and fire prevention and control activities.

I was one of the very few people in the vicinity of the McIntyre fire the night it started on 8 January 2003. In actual fact, I was probably the only person on the western side that went to the site of the fire - within 200 yards of the tree struck by lightning. I checked the fire on 9 and 10 January.

While observing the fire burning on 8 January, I rang Fire Control for the third time to give them an update. I had previously made one call from home at 19:28 hours and one call from the Huntly Station at Uriarra, 21:28 hours.

I was worried about the potential hazard this fire would cause if the wind blew up the next day. I rang at 22:37 hours and 22:38 hours¹. Still concerned, I rang Fire Control at 00:07 hours but did not get an answer. Refer to annex B.

Because of my continuing concern I rang the Fire Controller, Bruce Arthur on his mobile at 00:22 hours, Thursday morning. Bruce was at home in bed. I expressed my concerns about this fire to Bruce. I stated that we would need men to attend that day.

In the short time I spent watching the fire, I realised that if the wind blew from a North - West direction the fire would take off and move in the direction of Canberra.

Thursday 9 January 2003

I made a total of six calls to Fire Control on 9 January 2003. Each call was to express my concerns and give an update on the fire and weather. I must emphasise that I warned Fire Control about the danger this fire would cause if the wind blew North - West, *refer to annex B for list of calls.*

My daughter Gillian, and her partner Matthew Blundell, came up from Canberra on the same day in the evening, because they were worried about the fire.

On this day the fire burnt slowly. At one point the wind blew for a short time and took the fire eastward up a ridge.

I saw what appeared to be smoke to the west of our property. I made contact with Pine Harvesting Contractors, Malcolm Garner. I asked

¹ not on the telephone bill

him to get the truck drivers to check and look for smoke while travelling to and from Tumut to which he agreed.

I have since found out that this is the fire that was started by lightning on 8 January. This fire was controlled within 48 hours. This leaves the question;

How can two fires within close proximity have such different results, when the fire burning in the State Forest was controlled, but the fire in the national park was not?

Friday 10 January 2003

I visited the face of the fire twice on Friday 10 January 2003 in the afternoon. Matthew Blundell and my daughter were with me. The fire was burning 80 meters further down the ridge, westward. The fire was now approximately 300 meters from the lightning strike. It was still burning at a very slow rate with the height of the flames no more than 400 millimetres.

I spent some time around morning to midday giving guidance to a bulldozer driver trying to put in a break on the eastern side of the river under the power lines. His small dozer D5 was not capable of doing the work.

On Friday night Rob Hunt, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NP&WS) rang me at the farm to tell me because of the D5 being unable to complete the work a D8 dozer would be walked in that night and would be at the tower by day break.

I asked Rob if I could take the dozer down the river and he said "He is yours when he reaches the bottom". I asked "Can I take him along the eastern side?" Rob said, "Do not push down the trees". I said "What about a couple?" Rob said, "Okay". I understood that Rob did not want me to push down trees 'willy-nilly'. I asked "Can I take the dozer down stream?" Rob said, "As far as you like".

I rang Mr Trevor Nuttall (Manager of Pine Plantation) Timberland Forest P/L at 19:04 hours and expressed my concern to him of the fire and its potential (not much interest shown).

I rang Fire Control five times on this day. The fire flared again for a short period while the wind blew from the north to north - west, refer to annex B for list of calls.

Saturday 11 January 2003

I waited for the dozer Saturday morning and spoke to people gathered under the power line tower. The dozer proceeded down the ridge heading west towards the river. While the dozer made its way, one unit from the Brindabella Bush Fire Brigade (BBFB) arrived.

Vernon Walsh, an employee of Timberland Forests Pty Ltd, and I had a discussion about what we could do when the dozer arrived. We decided that the best action would be to push a firebreak down along the river to Limestone. This would also give access to the Wee Jasper fire units.

I was talking to the dozer operator, Mr Scanes of Hewatt Earthworks when the BBFB Captain, Peter Smith arrived. I told Captain Smith our plan to take the dozer down stream. He showed no interest and said that he was in control. I told the captain about the phone call I had from Rob Hunt a couple of times. I walked back to Vernon Walsh and he said, "I told you they would not listen to us".

Captain Smith returned and I asked if we could hop on the fire truck to help. Captain Smith said no. I then asked if Matthew Blundell was allowed to join in as he was a trained fire fighter and was wearing his protective clothing, including goggles, water bottle and overalls. Captain Smith asked if Matthew had a current ticket (which we knew nothing about). Matthew said he did not have a ticket and Captain Smith said he was not permitted on the truck. Captain Smith drove off with his unit. I have since found out that there is no 'current ticket' in NSW for fire fighters. I believe Captain Smith used this tactic to prevent us from helping.

Meanwhile, the dozer entered the river and made its way downstream. We decided to walk down with the dozer. The dozer reached deep water and could not move forward. The driver tried to reverse. I jumped into the river and indicated with my hand to exit via the eastern side bank. The driver attempted to do this but the bank was too steep. I then indicated with my hands to push gravel from the river to make an exit ramp. The first attempt failed but the second attempt succeeded.

I then walked in front of the dozer to lead the way as the Captain had already moved on. We travelled along the east bank about half a kilometre and met Captain Smith's truck. I spoke to him and was told in no uncertain terms that he was in control. We had another conversation about checking if the fire had crossed the river.

I went back to my vehicle where my daughter, Matthew, Vernon and others were present and relayed what had happened.

I must admit that I was feeling disheartened by Captain Smith's manner towards us. Captain Smith clearly did not want our assistance or any suggestions on how to work the dozer etc. We returned to our property and kept our distance.

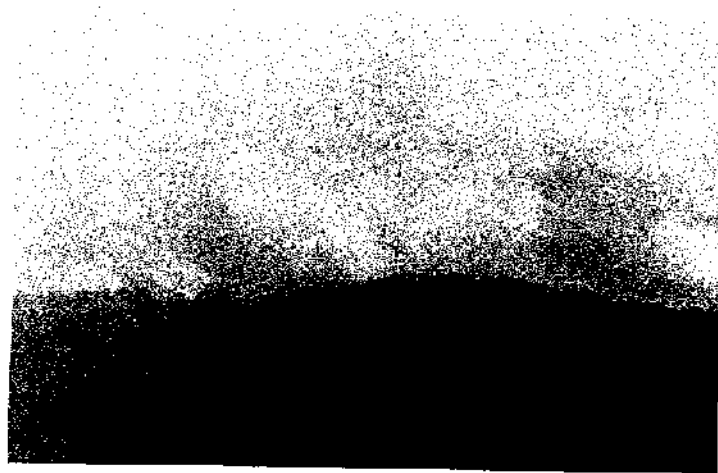
A helicopter flew in carrying a bucket and tried to fill it with water from the river but was having difficulty. I jumped into the river to help out but the pilot flew on to get water from another, unknown source.

We could see that the fire unit was doing a back burn but we were not sure to what extent.

By midday we could see fire to the east under the power lines. We listened to a receiver and learned that the fire unit was carrying out a back burn.

I rang the Fire Controller, Mr Bruce Arthur to express my opinion - that it was stupid to back burn under the current weather conditions. There was a hot dry northerly wind blowing.

The Fire Controller said "Wayne, you don't see the big picture".



The burning off continued and jumped the break under the power lines. Looking from our vantage point the fire appeared to have crossed containment lines and entered the bush. The helicopters arrived at about 14:00 hours to dump water.

Helicopter 236 took water from our dam. The pilot landed and I told him to take as much water as he wanted. I told him the other helicopters could use the dam too. We soon had about 5 or 6 helicopters taking water from the dam late into the afternoon.

Sunday 12 January 2003

We sat and watched things then crossed the river to look at the back burning by BBFB. The helicopters continued to fill from the dam to dump on the back burns. A large helicopter (Incredible Hulk) arrived

to join in. There were 6 out of 7 helicopters sourcing our small dam for water.



Our dam was emptying quickly so we rushed to organise pumps. We removed the pumps from our home to pump water from the river to the dam.

During this time, a NSW RFS Command Helicopter landed and an officer dressed in NSW RFS overalls spoke to my neighbour, Mr David Menzel. I returned and David told me to speak to the officer. The RFS officer asked if we needed anything and I said "A 4 inch pump and 130 meters of hose to reach the dam. In my absence, David had also asked the same officer for a 2-inch pump³.

We continued removing the 3 pumps protecting our house. These pumps were connected to more than 40 sprinklers, each covering a 10-meter radius.

I asked the Fire Captain if he had a pump on the truck. He did not have a pump but did try to pump water from the river using the truck. This did not work. The Brindabella Brigade left, the Fire Captain said he could not ask me to look after the fire but he would appreciate it if we would.

We worked until dark. I then travelled to Brindabella to borrow a pump from the RFS. The Captain insisted that this had to be returned

³ Despite several written requests, application forms etc I have not received any information on the name of this person, annex C refers.

first thing Monday morning. There was no fuel available for this pump.

We finally connected the 4th pump and successfully pumped water from the river to the dam throughout the night. We refuelled pumps at regular intervals to keep them running continuously for more than 14 hours. In total, 66 hours of pumping in excess of 720,000 litres of water using around 60 litres of fuel.

I rang my wife to ask her to arrange more fuel and food to be brought to the property.

The additional pumps we expected to be brought to us by the NSW RFS officer have still not arrived.

Monday 13 January 2003

By mid morning our dam was full of water. The helicopters came back again to use the dam. A friend, Steve Whittle brought unleaded fuel for the water pumps up from Canberra. We pumped water at regular intervals keeping the dam full at all times up to Friday 17 January 2003.

NSW RFS, NPW&S and fire fighters used the track made by the D8 to walk down to the river at night, patrolling the fire from the pylon to the river.

Tuesday 14 January 2003

I rang Trevor Nuttall at 13:12 hours again raising my concerns for the fire asking him to bring the dozer.

We returned to Canberra late Tuesday afternoon, as Matthew Blundell had to return to work Wednesday. It was my intention to return to my property immediately but by the time I reached Canberra I was exhausted.

My wife and I also phoned Bill Walter, our other neighbour to advise him of the situation. Bill is a doctor and could not leave Sydney because he had to operate the next day. Bill intended to ring his property manager, Trevor Nuttall of Timberland Forests, to get some action to assist with fire fighting.

Wednesday 15 January 2003

Rang Trevor Nuttall 08:56 hours and spoke with him for 22 minutes, trying to get his interest in the fire. Again, I asked him for the dozer to make fire breaks to prevent the possibility of the fire burning the pine plantation.

Still exhausted I stayed in Canberra. I was still concerned that the wind would change and blow from the West - North, the most

prevailing wind for this time of year. At this point I doubted myself. I had been telling the NSW RFS that the winds we were getting were unusual and if the prevailing winds arrived the fire would burn dangerously. I rang the weather bureau at 09:57 hours. I had a long conversation with staff from the bureau about the unusual southerly winds and if the wind might change. They said it was not if but when as a low was in the south.

While in Canberra I visited, Mr and Mrs Lonsdale, 3 Hakea Crescent, O'Connor. We discussed the fire and I told them that if the wind changed and blew from the North - West the fire would hit Canberra.

I spent the remainder of the day resting.

Thursday 16 January 2003

I returned to the farm, Lazy Acres on Thursday. On the way I called into the BBFB shed which is located in the Brindabella Valley. The Salvation Army needed help to erect a marque. The Salvation Army also needed some lights. I went to my property then took some lights back to them at about 19:30 hours.

I then made my way back to Wyora. As I was driving down towards the river I could see large flames near the house of my neighbour, Katja Mikhailovich. I rushed to her assistance.

Katja said "I have rung Fred Baker". Fred Baker and Vernon Walsh are employees of Timberland who had taken a personal interest in the progress of the fire. They had attended the property on 8 January to look at the fire.

Katja had put the fire out that crossed the river onto her property at Blackfellow Flat.

The fire was still burning fiercely on the other side of the river in the Brindabella National Park. Fred Baker and David Menzel, our neighbour from Wyora attended and we crossed the river with my vehicle and a trailer carrying one 700 litre slip on fire fighting unit and one 400 litre slip on unit.

We worked until we extinguished the fire. We cut down six burning trees in the process. We monitored the fire throughout the night.

No National Parks or RFS personnel attended the fire. Although this fire was in the Brindabella National Park, had Katja not been there, the fire would have taken off in a westerly direction until who knows? Where were the supposed fire fighters? The fire fighters sat at the powerlines. As had been their pattern, they left at dark.

Friday 17 January 2003

I pumped water from the river into the dam. It was still fairly quiet but I felt uneasy about the conditions. I rang Fire Control at 08:45 hours and 08:52 hours to give an update from my end. I requested Fire Control to ascertain from the fire fighters what was happening at Limestone.

The helicopters arrived mid morning for more water. I rang Fire Control again at 14:58 hours to ask what was happening at Limestone. Again, I asked them to contact the fire fighters at Limestone. I was concerned. The smoke I could see was only little but I was worried that it was out of view for the fire fighters at Limestone.

I asked the operator, Jenny Filmer to ring back after she contacted them but she said she was too busy. I told Jenny that I was worried about the smoke and conditions.

Jenny Filmer said "If the fire crosses the river we will put it out".

We crossed over the river and cleared part of Lowells Track to McIntyres Hut, trying to get a better view. Later in the day we left Wyora; Fred Baker and I drove to the head of the track leading to Limestone to see what was happening. We spoke to a fire fighter and a NPWS Ranger called Ken. Captain Smith arrived with his wife and took over the conversation. We returned to our car. Fred Baker then rang Trevor Nuttall, Timberland Forest (part manager of Wyora and owner of 40 acres). Trevor Nuttall is Fred Baker and Vernon Walsh's boss.

We stressed the seriousness of the fire and said that equipment/dozer was needed urgently at Wyora. Trevor said that dozers were no good in that country. Then he said to ring back in half an hour. He planned to ring Yass Fire Control to get a more current update. Fred Baker explained that we had been talking to NP&WS and the update was as current as possible.

I heard the owner of South Wee Jasper station, John Parker, say over the fire channel that there was a fire in Wyora, which is our area. I took the microphone:

I said "John, whereabouts?".

John said "I can see the flames".

We then rushed back to Wyora, our place and crossed over the river towards McIntyres Hut. The fire was quite visible on the opposite side of the river in Wyora.

I rang my wife at 22:13 hours and asked her to get Fire Control to ring me urgently (I could not remember their number) as the fire was now raging out of control. As no call was received, I rang Fire Control at 10:26 to ask for help and tell them the fire was out of control. The operator was male:

He said "Do you have a grid referencce?".

I said "On Tommys Flat, south of McIntyres Hut".

I told him again that the fire was out of control and that we needed help.

He said "If you need property protection ring 000".

Again I stressed that things were bad and that we needed help urgently. His response was unchanged, ring 000 etc.

I said "Things are shit here, we need help".

Again, I was told to ring 000.

I was dumbfounded. Had I proceeded with the 000 call, my request would have ended up back at Queanbeyan Fire Control – to whom I was already talking. It was their responsibility to action this call.

I had rung Fire Control 24 times, *refer to annex B for list of calls*. I could not believe it! All the time and effort put in by me, my friends and my neighbours to help RFS and the NP&WS with the fire in the National Park was not reciprocated. The fire crossed to private property and we were abandoned (dumped).

I then rang my wife to get some help from friends.

I rang my neighbour Don Stuart to advise him of the fire. He said he had spoken to Fire Control at 22:00 hours – *refer to annex D*. Fire Control rang Don back. They said that the fire was on Tommys Flat within containment lines. I told Don that there were no containment lines on Tommys Flat and that he was in the gun barrel with the fire heading in his direction. The Fire Control information about containment lines on Tommys Flat is nothing but a lie and had the potential to endanger his life.

Don said that he would go out on the dozer that night. I talked him out of this as I believed that if the fire escalated further, his life would be in danger.

I then rang my immediate neighbour Katja Mikhailovich. I informed her about the situation. She said she would be up first thing in the morning. Mr Fred Baker was present when I made these calls.

Saturday 18 January 2003

Around 08:30 hours I went to see Don Stuart at Mt Vale to find out what was happening with the bulldozer following our conversation Friday night. When I left Don's I travelled to Wyora Huts where I found a large group of men and numerous vehicles. The group included the Forestry Service, Trevor Nuttall, Vern, Fred and David Menzel.

We were discussing what actions should be taken, the location of the fire breaks etc. We spoke about the timberland dozer doing Bill Walters north end. Forestry planned to take their dozer to the southern end and dozer track fire breaks to the river, (near Katja Mikhailovich's property) During these discussions I told them there were 3 ladies down on Blackfellow Flats in a house on their own. I asked if a fire unit could go down to confirm that they were all right. I informed them of the current situation.

I have since learned from Katja that no units arrived at her place. One or two forestry vehicles turned up, including a dozer, just before she had to evacuate. She described the experience as traumatic – they were shouting at her, telling her to get out. They made no effort to go down to her until about 1100 hours. Forestry parked their dozer in the river and bolted.

During the earlier conversation I realised that Trevor was giving instructions and advice, but it should have been Fred and David doing this. They should have been showing Forestry around as they know the lie of the land, tracks etc much better than anyone else. Trevor Nuttall had not been anywhere in the vicinity of Wyora or the fire for its duration. When he did, finally, it was flying over it in a helicopter to see what was happening.

I said "Trevor, you know shit about what is happening"

I then went back to my place. We were trying to prepare ourselves in case the fire headed our way. A friend, Gary Steele and his son had arrived. They helped me to relocate machinery, cattle etc.

The direction of the fire suddenly changed. It was now headed directly for our property.

Around midday a Forestry helicopter landed at our dam and spoke to me. He told me (ordered me) to get out. I was not happy. I gave it some thought and then left. I proceeded to Wyora Huts (owned by my neighbour David Menzel) where forestry workers were sitting around with machinery etc.

Tuesday 21 January 2003

I rang Fire Control at Queanbeyan and spoke to John Winter, Media Officer, Corporate Affairs, Rose Hill Office at 0743 hours on the 21st January 2003. I asked if calls were on tape.


John said "All calls made to Fire Control were taped".

I said "You bastards will hang on your own evidence".

I now ask the inquiry to make these tapes available, as they will confirm the conversations I have referred to.

I am willing to address the inquiry, and request the right to provide a written response after reading the reports by NPWS and NSW RFS.

I extend to you an invitation to visit our property/area and experience first hand the devastation caused to the bush, flora and fauna and the subsequent erosion and pollution of our once beautiful river.



Wayne K West
7th May 2003