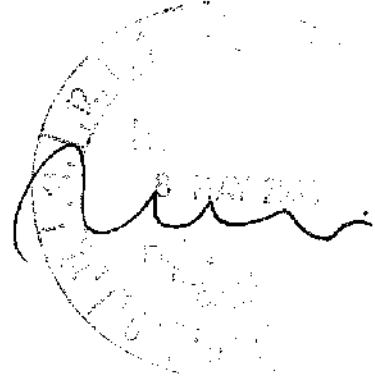


Sub 151



To
The select committee on the recent bushfires.

I spent my childhood years at Tanybryn near Mt.Sabine in the Otway Ranges.
Commenced work with the Forests Commission 1954 and worked mostly in the Otways on road construction/maintenance, was a crew leader for many years engaged in all aspects of field operations including hazard reduction, fire fighting and forest utilization.
Retired in 1991 as forest Overseer, a position I enjoyed from 1962.

Below are some comments based on my experience over the years.

(a) The extent and impact of bushfires on the environment, private and public assets and local communities;

#The impact on the environment is great when wild fires occur in areas with heavy fuel loads during hot dry conditions.
They often cause enormous damage to private property assets with severe hardship for local communities.

(b) The causes of and risk factors contributing to the impact and severity of bushfires.

#Fires are caused by many different sources, some natural, (lightning, spontaneous combustion etc) others accidental (power lines, vehicles, tractors and so on).
Also some are from deliberate lighting for a number of reasons (removal of scrub and accumulated fuel, general land clearing).
Severity of fires from any of the causes is much greater where fire protection measures have not been undertaken beforehand.

(c) The adequacy economic and environmental impact of hazard reduction and other strategies.

For the number of wildfires over recent years that have reached disastrous proportions it would seem that something is not working as well as might be expected.
A number of things may contribute to the situation.
Not enough funds available, or not directed to hazard reduction works.
Insufficient manpower, lack of training or experience in forest management.
Pressure from so-called environment/preservation groups making the departments not prepared to undertake the responsibility for hazard reduction/burning.
Expecting CFA volunteers to undertake work in unmanaged forests, outside the scope of their training and the ability of their equipment.

(d) Appropriate land management policies and practices to mitigate damage caused by bushfires.

National Parks seem to have a preservation approach, and the idea of a wilderness for their areas generally, and overuse of other areas around specific features i.e. picnic places, waterfalls, lookouts, beauty spots etc.
They do not keep tracks open and safe for fire fighting, or carry out very much effective hazard reduction within the parks.
Forest management is declining with the fading out of logging in the Otways due to the illegal activities of protestors and pressure groups using the media to spread propaganda claiming the forests will disappear for ever.
A general conception by the public is that the only industry worth having is the tourist industry, and that our timber and forest products will all be met from somewhere else.

(e) Any alternative or developmental bushfire mitigation and prevention approaches and the appropriate direction of research into bushfire mitigation.

Almost every major bushfire since 1850 has been researched, the 1939 bushfire inquiry by Commissioner Judge Stretton made many recommendations, many of these were ignored over the years.

The 1983 fires better known as Ash Wednesday were also inquired into, with information sifted through as with a fine toothed comb, and again many recommendations were made regarding the removal of fire hazards, proper and adequate street, road and track maintenance particularly around settlements along the Great Ocean Road where the loss of property was enormous.

Again many of those recommendations seem to have been ignored, as native vegetation regulations have overridden common sense with fuel loads in many places greater than ever and access for fire fighting vehicles inadequate.

The Lorne-Angahook park is also carrying heavy fuel, with tracks and roads closed off alongside built up areas, from the air houses are almost invisible in dense bush.

(f) The appropriateness of existing planning and building codes, in protecting life and property.

I am not personally familiar with all of the building regulations, however if they are being adhered to along the Great Ocean Road I find it difficult to see how the buildings could possibly be safe in a major fire with such volumes of native vegetation hanging over them, and in some cases built into them.

If the controlling bodies (Councils etc) are making regulations that put people and properties at risk, they must be prepared to bear a large share of the cost, rather than people pay through huge insurance premiums.

(g) The adequacy of current response arrangements for fire fighting.

Since the Ash Wednesday fire "mega dollars" have been spent on upgrading and training for the CFA, they have a reporting /communication system purported to be the best available, and they appear to respond very quickly to all fires.

They do a superb job particularly with buildings and farm fires, however they are not equipped for fighting forest fires and do not have heavy machinery to gain access.

The Department of S&E should be responsible for forest fires, however their numbers seem to be less than they should be to protect such a large area of forest.

No matter how good the fire fighting service/s are they are no match for fires in unmanaged forests when weather conditions are extreme.

National Parks do not seem to be equipped for forest fire fighting as they are mostly guides and service people with part time crews for works in summer, none are bushmen, and forest management is not on their agenda.

(h) The adequacy of deployment of firefighting resources.

Whenever a number of different agencies are involved there is always some confusion, in every case it is very important that those in charge of a fire are very conversant with the area and every detail within it.

Nothing will substitute a well-resourced forest service with an intimate working knowledge of the area.

(i) Liability, insurance coverage and related matters;

The less maintenance within the forest the greater the liability must surely be.

Insurance can never replace what is burnt in full.

The cost of insurance will continue to rise to cover costs.

(j) The roles and contributions of volunteers, management practices and future trends.

Because most CFA members are volunteers and have work commitments or businesses to run it is a big ask to expect them to attend major fires almost anywhere in Australia and in some cases overseas.

CFA also perform many other services, assist Police at accidents traffic control, searches and a host of other activities through out the whole year.

It would appear that in this Otway area if/when the National Park is extended the CFA will be called on much more to fight forest fires, as the logging is also being cut back and stopped altogether by 2008 leaving the Forest Dep. and timber workers non existent.

Unless the National Parks change the way they have operated in the past and spend vast amounts of money on roads, tracks, fire breaks and hazard reduction in my humble opinion the future looks bleak I hope my comments may be of some help to the inquiry, should you require any other information or assistance I am happy to help if I am able.