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From:
Sent: Thursday, 8 May 2003 9:54 AM
To: Committee, Bushfires (REPS)
Subject: RUSHWORTH FIRE BRIGADE.doc

RUSHWORTH FIRE BRIGADE

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SUBMISSION ON RECENT BUSH FIRE

7th May 2003

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Rushworth Fire Brigade have resolved to make this submission with regard to our role in the protection of the township of Rushworth from a major fire we realise that the inquiry is to examine the North East fires. Fire prevention measures and response to these fires but belief that the inquiry should be wide ranging examining the whole spectre of fire prevention in high risk areas.

In short, we have experienced a bureaucratic attitude towards our fire prevention measures, which have been mainly burning of crown land in and on the perimeter of the town.

For some twenty years, the brigade had burnt private land, shire land and crown land, to reduce the fuel load and clean up tracts of land so that they would become lineal breaks should a significant fire threaten the town. Over many years with the help of the community a reasonable, although not complete perimeter existed on the town's boundary. As the town has expanded, land that had previously been unoccupied has been built on, meaning that the town's houses in some areas abut directly onto the State Forest.

Years ago a fire protection plan was instigated with our brigade pushing this to be introduced, this plan was developed for coordinated fuel reduction in the forest surrounding the town and with the N R E coordinating this jointly, we have been able to create fuel reduced area's around the township. Crown land areas were not identified in the plan, as areas to be burnt or fuel reduced some 4 to 5 years ago the N R E informed our Brigade that they would have to have a department employee at any of these burns, this proved to be a waste of their resources as on those evenings a variety of burns were carried out on both private and crown land, so we were issued with a permit to burn on crown land. During this period, joint burns were carried out in the forest area's with our brigade organising other brigades from Region 22, to assist with these evening burns, providing on occasions a Barbeque tea for both N R E crews and brigade crews who attended on these evenings. We have continually tried to promote and believe that a good relationship developed and continues between both our C F A fire fighting crews and N R E crews with both having respect for the different fire fighting abilities in the different environments.

Two years ago we were told that we could no longer carry out any fuel reduction on crown land and that it was the Department Of Natural Resources and Environment's responsibility and they would carry out slashing not burning in these area's.

Initially we were disappointed that our previous work in cleaning up area's so that our brigade could burn them easily was now to be not carried out and slashing was to be the preferred option.

The Rushworth Fire Brigade has promoted a close working relationship with N R E staff trying to break down barriers of paid and unpaid fire fighters, and has promoted a respect of people whether they wear green or yellow overalls.

This is now proving to be a difficult task with a seeming lack of respect and trust from some areas within the now Department of Sustainability and Environment, which have developed a seeming lack of respect for the Country Fire Authority volunteers who have diligently done these works.

Although we have not mentioned the North East Fires, to which 17 of our members attended, in differing roles and on more than one occasion. Our brigade feels that the current lack of faith from D S E towards the C F A volunteers will lead to a future that will see more, large fires and a developing attitude that their authority and lack of coordinated fire prevention will see more smaller towns threatened by fires.

It would be good to say something good about Parks Victoria, but having had an increase of Box Ironbark Forest turned into National Park, they appear to be doing nothing about fire prevention. Already our grass roots members who are now paying more for firewood and able to get less are saying we are being locked out of the bush except for when there is a fire so let them bring in their personnel to control it.

This is a further backward step, but when people see livelihoods being lost and a traditional heating medium taken away this will further add to a general community's displeasure.

In conclusion it is hoped that your inquiry will be successful in creating measures for a plan of action for reduction of bush fire hazards and remove the present bureaucratic rules that have been imposed on brigades such as ours hindering our members from completing works that we feel necessary for the protection of the townships.

Should you wish to meet with our brigade members, to discuss our submission we would be pleased to do so.

Yours Faithfully

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