

Sub 165

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF GRANT

Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires

Comments in line with Terms of Reference

(a)

The extent and impact of Bushfires on the environment, private and public assets are devastating and has been illustrated by the recent NSW, ACT & Victorian Bushfires. The significant monetary, asset, environmental and personal losses incurred have been demonstrated.

(b)

Fire can be ignited in many different ways and in many cases it is difficult to define a cause. Some causes are natural, eg. Lightning, Wind (trees over power lines) and some involve Human intervention.

Land management practices and policies have a large impact on the possible severity of bushfires, the reduction of fuel (Hazard Reduction) in National Parks State Forests, other Crown Land, and Private Property is essential if Bushfires are to be kept within manageable proportions. This can be achieved under sound land management and environmental practices but it is essential that sufficient funds are allocated to enable these practices to be carried out.

(c)

It is considered that the adequacy of hazard reduction is insufficient in many areas. The economic impact of Bushfires on Communities, State's and Territories cannot be underestimated. The cost of Fire Control in the recent interstate bushfires has demonstrated this fact.

(d)

It is contended that land management practice's are inappropriate in many areas. The impact of cool prescribed burns in national parks and State forest's has a lesser impact on native flora and fauna than an intense uncontrolled bushfire. The Australian environment and the nature of its plants and wildlife have adapted to the impact of fire on their environment. This is evident by the evolution of many of our species.

(e)

Council believes that the South Australian approach to Bushfire Prevention is heading in the right direction. Bushfire Awareness and education of the general public is essential if losses are to be kept to a minimum. However, at this time it is felt that funding for these programs is inadequate to meet the desired needs. Bushfire research needs to be carried out and it is essential that adequate funding is made available so that this essential research may continue. In addition, a satellite mapping strategy would enable vulnerable areas to be identified. With this strategy in place a complete breakdown of vegetation types could be ascertained. This could be further extended to determine the true level of fuel loadings in extreme fire prone areas.

(f)

Existing planning and building codes are inadequate. The development of urban and urban fringe development into bushland area's should require sound planning, land management and building design practices to lessen the impact of an uncontrolled bushfire on these areas.

(g)
No Comment.

(h)
No Comment.

(i)
Liability is often difficult to establish, but if adequate attention is not paid to Hazard Reduction practices, parties involved may find they have a case to answer. Insurance Companies need to take into consideration the reduction of premiums for those in the community who do take measure's to reduce the impact of fire on themselves and their communities.

(j)
The role and contributions of Volunteers cannot be underestimated.
The cost of Bushfire Suppression and Prevention could not be borne by this Country if it were not for the training, expertise and dedication of the Volunteer.
The Volunteer ethic is very strong throughout the Emergency Services, and contains to a degree the ANZAC spirit of camaraderie and mateship.
It is essential that these's volunteer's are adequately funded with regard to equipment training and infrastructure.

Comment.

The establishment of Australia wide Bushfire Summits is essential for providing Government authorities and organisations with up to date information with regard Fire Suppression and Prevention, and to make an Australia wide assessment of current Bushfire Prevention Protection and Control strategies for the future.

Note.

Currently South Australian Premier Mike Rann is conducting Regional Bushfire Forums in this state. These's forums are designed to collect information from in the field to be presented to the Premier's Bushfire Summit to be held in Adelaide on the 23rd of May.

A copy of this Council's submission to the Premiers Bushfire Summit has been appended for your information.

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF GRANT

REGIONAL BUSHFIRE FORUM AND PREMIERS BUSHFIRE SUMMIT

Comments to be put forward at the Regional Bushfire Forum to be held at Penola on the 8th May 2003 with a view to them being considered at the Premiers Bushfire Summit to be held on 23rd May 2003.

1. The States Preparedness for Major Bushfires

- Concerns are expressed over the non availability of Group water carriers ("Bulkies")
- With the number of brigade units requiring replacement within the next few years (estimated at + 80) and given the current financial situation of CFS funds, will sufficient capital expenditure be made available to achieve the required change overs?
- Within the South East CFS area no capital works funding for the upgrade of fire stations has been made available since the upgrade of Robe station some 3 to 4 years ago. For this reason these assets are slowly deteriorating to a condition where major expenditure will be required to return them to a satisfactory standard.
- The lack of funding has meant that some essential maintenance work on aging equipment has only been carried out on an as needed basis rather than during a preferred scheduled maintenance program. This could lead to the necessity to replace appliance's pumps, etc and the Groups have expressed concerns as to where these funds will come from?
- The poor/non performance of GRN radios and pagers in some areas of the South East is seen as having a negative impact on the states preparedness for major bushfire incidents.
- To ensure the preparedness of the South East area of the State to combat major bushfires it is essential that the availability of a second fire bomber at the Mt Gambier Airport is ongoing, particularly during the fire danger season/s.

2. Current State and Urban Planning Laws and How They Impact On Fire Risk

- At this time the only area declared as a special fires area is the Mt Lofty/Adelaide Hills. It is recommended that further categorising of fire risk areas should be considered with input from local councils being high priority.

3. Learning From Interstate Experience Particularly NSW & ACT.

- Trees planted as revegetation projects should be in patches rather than a continuous line. This will prevent a wick effect that can rapidly carry a fire from one area to another.

4. Strategies to Improve preparedness and Community Safety

- It is vital that the Community Fire Safe Program be adequately funded and continued throughout the various Regions. Much of the impetus gained through these programs being held at various townships and settlements throughout our area has, it is felt, been lost due to the lack of a Regional Facilitator over the last fire danger season.
- Appropriate funding should be made available so that other public education programs can be held on a regular basis. Such public education programs are seen as being essential to improve the communities' preparedness and ultimate safety.
- With recent findings from NSW and the ACT, it is considered essential that National Parks and Wildlife SA be adequately funded to effectively manage public lands under their control for fire prevention purposes.