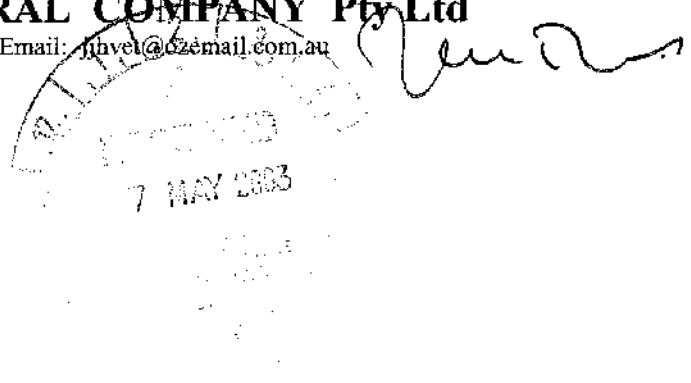


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Submission to Federal Fire Inquiry

Fire has and always will be a defining element of the Australian eco-system. Our fauna and flora has been developed and modified by fire to become both tolerant of and dependent on it.

Lightning strikes from dry storms are a constant feature of the Australian Summer. The early settlers copied the Aborigines and used fire as a tool and learnt to live with the consequences.

The only effective philosophy of fire is they all start small, so hit hard and early. Before Koperberg our biggest problem was persuading tight-fisted Shire bean-counters to get dozers and graders to the fire in the initial response, not to wait until the situation was out of control. Compare the ultimate total cost with the initial cost of rapid response.

We now have the same problem with the early deployment of aircraft, particularly in rough and remote areas.

“Hit hard and early” was the NSW Forest Commission way until they too were emasculated by funding cuts and philosophic fools pushing green barrows.

Talk to men like Roy Free who have forgotten more than the present day bureaucrats will ever know.

Devolution, not centralised control is what’s needed, local knowledge is of paramount importance, trust the man on the ground, assess needs early and act speedily with adequate resources.

Ultimately bushfire fighting functions on trust, you constantly trust the other bloke’s judgement. It is the very essence of Australian ethos and mateship, you truly are your “brother’s keeper”.

History will show over the years fires occur in same areas and tend to follow similar patterns (local knowledge again). The Canberra fires were burning for nearly a fortnight before Sat 18th Jan

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The Stretton report on 1939 Victorian fires cites the same scenario, the fires were burning for days before Black Friday, then coalesced on a major blow-up day.

Home preparedness: green lawns, no flammable shrubs, tea-tree screens, lattice or pole construction with raised wooden decks. Pencil pines, roof gutters cause problems, likewise tanbark chips and straw mulch.

General untidiness, stuff stacked against house and sheds, firewood, old timber fences and creepers, complex roofs with valleys collect leaves and debris.

Property preparedness: use property planning, species selection, firebreaks, fallowing, strategic sheep grazing. NPWS could well copy the latter (and raise some income)

Essential to have standpipes and gravity reserve water supply, not depend solely electric pressure pumps.

Finance: I deplore the accent on salaries and bureaucratic infrastructure rather than for gear, also the hijacking of insurance, which should fund injured volunteers, not stress leave for incompetents.

National parks are just that, for people, not an elite athletic pedestrian minority, rejoicing in their exclusive use of so-called wilderness areas.

These National Parks should be divided into cells by a system of strategically situated and properly constructed permanent trails, serving as both access roads and firebreaks.

The failure to design, construct and regularly maintain such facilities must surely be a failure to provide a safe workplace environment in terms of OH&S

Lately most fire deaths have been in National Parks, eg Wingello & Kuringai.

Likewise with the failure to implement hazard reduction burning off with low intensity fires in Autumn. Remember the Hume Snowy scheme. Years of grazing of Snow Leases & annual burning as stock departed.

Where are Slater & Gordon? Surely the affected property owners should be able to sue NPWS for damage caused by escaped fires.

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Aircraft: failure to utilize experienced fixed wing operators because of personal disagreements is an abuse of power. Fixed wing can deliver more water and travel faster than baby helicopters. Also much cheaper per hour and don't spread sparks.

Lecturers in tertiary institutions training would-be Yogis lack understanding of fire behaviour, some promulgating a theory that fire can choke from too much fuel, have they never heard of Candlebark?

The day the first white man stepped ashore this country changed forever, we must learn from history and experience and pay no attention to political correctness, like drought, fire is both an intellectual and a technological challenge.

The technology is available, the will to apply it, and formulate policies based on need and not green enviro babble is sorely lacking. Sadly green philosophy is often used by authorities to cloak simple tight-fistedness, there are few votes in hazard reduction measures, and both fire fighting and fire protection come with a considerable price tag.

To show I am not a latecomer on the road to Damascus I have attached some earlier writings in the same vein.

Jervis Hayes