

PARLIAMENTRY BUSINESS COMMITTEES.  
SENATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC AMINISTRATION.  
BUSH FIRE RECOVERY.

Michael John Boyden  
Environmental Forester (Retired)

## 1.

### **REPORT TO THE BUSHFIRE RECOVERY COMMITTEE.** March 2020

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This report will address some matters that have not been dealt with since settlement.

Trying to impose our British and European way of life onto the Australian Bush was never going to work. The Australian Bush has evolved in a FIRE ENVIRONMENT, so much so that many of our Native species of Flora require FIRE to survive and regenerate.

I propose in this report to explain how a strategic burning programme can be Implemented, by using a Soil Classification System to allocate Burning Priorities.

There is also a need to Re-Boot our attitude to the role of some State and Commonwealth Government Departments. For Australia to keep pace with the changing climate, we need to give the Management of the Natural environment much higher priority.

#### **SUMMARY**

The following plan sets out how Australian Forested and Non Forested land can be better managed in a way, more suited to the unique Australian Landscape.

Australia's Landscape has developed over millions of years, to survive and regenerate in a Fire Environment. Naturally the fires are started by lightning strike , and more recently Aboriginal Communities. These fires burn to natural boundaries, unheeded by modern day fencing and town boundaries.

**The Australian bush cannot be managed by British and European methods.**

**My plan hopes to encourage off season burning (late Autumn, Winter, and early Spring).** However our previous attempts at Protective Burning have got to fundamentally change.

2.

## **PROPOSED CHANGES**

### Planned Burns

It is common practice with National Parks and Wild Life Service (NPWS), Government Forestry, Private Forests, and Tasmanian Fire Service; to plan large areas of forest to light up in the Spring / Autumn Season, as a strategic protection for the Summer Season.

There are several downsides to the Protective Burns System which jeopardize the success of this method.

1. Larger and larger areas are planned in an attempt to use less staff.
2. A large burn requires agreement to burn from many neighbours and there is often a minority dispute which postpones the burning plan.
3. The list of burns which were postponed, then add pressure to the limited staff of these organizations; so they attempt burns at the wrong time of year, in order to get through the list.
4. Most neighbours have wooden fences which are required to be protected, otherwise agreement to burn is not signed off.
5. Nearly all boundaries between different ownerships are straight lines.  
However fires burn along topographic lines.

## **To overcome all the above problems we need to completely re-think the ATTITUDE TO THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH.**

What I propose is to classify all land by THREE Soil Types - A, B, and C.

Each of these types will receive a different Priority of Protective Burning.

CLASS A is our very valuable land and must be protected from wild fire at all costs.

CLASS B this moderately valuable land, should be lightly burnt regularly between

ten to twenty year intervals. However should contain a network of strategically placed managed firebreaks.

3.

CLASS C . Is our poorer soils and should be regularly lightly burnt every five to ten years.

These three classes are derived from G.I.S overlays (Geophysical Information System) which is downloaded from ARCMAP.

The original soil classification is broken into about seventeen classes but when overlaid by Forest P.I Types, a Three Tier system emerges. In the examples see Appendix1, the best soils were described as Eucalypt Tall forest; the 'B' soils were described as Low Eucalypt forest; and the 'C' sites were made up of Non-forest, Heath and Scrub.

Using the above maps and overlays, an experienced Field Officer can then draw up an operational Burning Plan for each map sheet. The officer will need to draw on experience regarding wind; humidity; temperature and natural features: See Appendix 2 (Which is my version of an OPERATIONAL BURNING PLAN )

Efficiencies can be gained by linking natural features (e.g. lakes etc) with limited amounts of constructed fire break.

If this system is adopted, over time it will restore the integrity of the bush. Please see (Appendix 1) for examples of Soil Types.

### **Examples of Soil Classification Systems**

Here are examples of how different land Tenures may be managed under a Soil

Classification System :-

#### **1. FORESTRY:**

Native Forest within a forest estate (Private or Government) .

CLASS A land is to be used for high quality Timber production. This land will require extreme fire management, as the product is valuable and therefore Risk Management is high. Strategic fire breaks surrounding and internally so that fire inside the crop is controlled if there is a wild fire. The main object is to grow unburnt straight trees over several natural layers of secondary species, understorey and ground cover.

4.

CLASS B land can be used for lower grade log or pulpwood production. This land is surrounded by strategic fire breaks, but is burnt at appropriate times i.e. Winter, damp conditions, non bird nesting periods. These lands will have a well managed fire regime. Priority to keep fuels to a manageable level.

CLASS C land primarily used for protective burning, recreation, grazing and animal habitat. Main object is to create **large areas of low fuel**, however areas to be burnt in late Autumn or Winter, to reduce fire intensity and protect nesting birds and underground animals.

## **2. AGRICULTURE LAND :-**

**Class A** land to be used for:

- Intensive cropping e.g. vegetables, fruit, flowers etc
- Dairy Farming - Grass Fed Cows
- Meat production - Grass fed cattle
- Forested land protected as for Forestry as listed above.

### **Class B**

This second class land can be used for Class A uses, however this should not be encouraged. To produce Class A products on this soil would be unprofitable in the long term under Australian Conditions.

Class B continued - **Uses:** = Cattle grazing i.e. meat production

= Fat lamb grazing i.e. meat production

= Orchards, currents and berries, crops requiring low water use (e.g. sorghum, pepper, canola)

= Pine and Eucalyptus Plantations.

Forested land in this area to be managed as for Forestry above. The priority to keep fuel to manageable levels.

### **Class C**

**Uses:** = Sheep, goats etc, grazing for fine wool production

= Grain, wheat, all crops which require shallow soil

= Many of these areas have previously been cleared of vegetation and henceforth failed as farm land. In many cases left barren instead of supporting natural native plants, which would support native animals and birds.

5.

**3. NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION AREAS**

**Class A** - To be protected from fire by surround burning of B and C classified land.

**Class B** - Land has surrounding fire break network but may be burnt at regular intervals.

Light winter burns at ten to twenty year intervals.

**Class C** - This land can be regularly burnt every five to ten years. However will need proper management i.e. seed retention, animal habitat management etc.

**Note:- *HYGIENE CONTROLS AT ALL ACCESS POINTS FOR ALL AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PARKS***

**Note :- *Existing National Parks and Conservation Land to remain unchanged, however all subsequent Park dedication shall only occur on B and C type land.***

**TO PROTECT OUR COUNTRY FROM FURTHER BUSH FIRE DISASTERS , I PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING CHANGES:-**

To protect our country , Australia needs to achieve a change in perception as suggested in my Soil Type Maps. Australians must manage their GUM TREE FORESTS in a very different way from the European Deciduous Forests.

For this to happen it is of paramount importance that the Department of Environment be given specific Legislative Powers to provide a Code of Practice, so that Burning Priorities can be established.

**1. PRINCIPLES :**

a) The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can no longer be the driver in all forms of Government and Business.

b) The Management of our land (i.e. all land including suburbia and industrial subdivisions) are our most important Heritage.

***The successful Management of the land will identify this generation to all future generations.***

c) For this reason the Department of the Environment need to be given appropriate legislation powers to force all other land users to complete Protective Burning and Firebreak constructions and maintenance on time.

6.

**2. STRATEGY:**

1. All land (over all Australia and its Islands) to be classified by SOIL TYPE.
2. That classification then determine the appropriate land use.
3. Legislation be designated to support the land classification.
4. The SOIL TYPE suggested are A.B. and C.

Very simply :-           A= Prime Land   ( PI potential of 1 or 2 )

                                  .B= Secondary land (PI potential of 3 )

                                  C = Tertiary land   ( PI potential of 4 or less )

( PI = Photo Interpretation from Forestry Dept maps )

5. All land owners (including Government Instrumentalities) to be responsible for burning their own property. Failure to achieve will attract fines.
6. Protective Burning is and always will be, an integral part of Australian Life. Human opposition for reasons of :
  - a) Poor respiratory health -
  - b) Personal inconvenience due to e.g. property boundaries -
  - c) Unconstitutional Conservative challenges -
  - d) National and World Heritage objections -
  - e) Extreme Conservationist emotions –

will be totally **Ignored.**

7. In future all new Residential and Industrial Subdivisions can only occur on “C” classified land.

“B” land if it occurs within a residential subdivision should be allocated as

Parkland and Recreation.

7.

### **3.. CONCLUSION**

When these changes to Legislation and Field Planning are made, and with input from experienced field staff on Burning Plans; we may profess to be making progress

- towards :-
- a) Preserving the integrity of our Australian Bush.
  - b) Realising that the Climate is changing, and we are addressing the problem .
- and
- c) We realise that the British System of Government does not always address the Australian Situation.

-----

Michael John Boyden  
Environmental Forester (Retired)