

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE RESPONSE TO RECENT FIRES AFFECTING THE TASMANIAN WILDERNESS WORLD HERITAGE AREA CONCERNING PROTECTION OF THE NORTHERN MARGIN OF THE AREA.

This submission is concerned with one issue - the importance of giving much better protection to the northern part of the World Heritage Area from fires spreading from adjoining land. The recent fires spread down wind and uphill into the Area in blow up conditions in which fighting the head fire was too dangerous for people or machines, a situation which is predictable, has been the case for previous fires, and will continue unless appropriate measures are taken to integrate fire management in the World Heritage Area with that in adjoining land.

It has been reported that fires burnt in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) in early 2016 originated from lightning strikes outside the Area. For some time the weather was mild, so the fires spread little, but under blow up conditions they expanded rapidly, firebrands being thrown down wind and uphill well in front of the ground fire. In these conditions it is too dangerous to send people to fight the spot fires that result. The use of aircraft (including helicopters) has the same limitation, meaning that fire fighting has to await the arrival of milder weather. This sequence of events is the norm in Tasmania, and other places around the world.

The history of a fire of 1984 which began near Lake Rowallan and burnt into the TWWHA is worthy of mention. It originated on the shore of the Lake, probably as an escape from an angler's campfire. For some days it was contained to a small area, but escaped under blow up conditions, being stopped by Lake Meston having burnt past Lakes Bill and Myrtle and including Mount Rogoona. It killed many areas of fire sensitive vegetation, pencil pines and fagus communities being of particular note. Much of the upland country burnt was re-burnt in 2016, creating further damage to fire sensitive species and communities.

In comments on the Draft Recreation Zone Plan of 2013 for the "Walls of Jerusalem National Park I wrote that I was disturbed that the draft took no account of 'the major risk to vegetation of the Recreation Zone from fires invading from the lower lands to the north', noting that the matter was recognised but dismissed as an external factor 'beyond the scope of this plan'. I recommended that the matter be dealt with as a matter of urgency, a general plan for managing fires in the Park (and upwind areas of State forest) being the best solution. I added that the 'Lake Rowallan wildfire of late last century can be considered, unfortunately, to be a foretaste of what is too likely to occur in the sub-alpine and alpine areas of the Park'.

The Final Plan (of 2013) for the Recreation Zone of The Walls of Jerusalem National Park states that 'fires may result from external factors beyond the scope of this plan', a subject 'being addressed as part of the PWS (Parks and Wildlife Service) Northern Regional Strategic Fire Management Plan (2009)'. This Plan reads, in part, 'On completion of the strategic fire management planning project the process which planned burns and wildfires will be managed on PWS managed land will be a function of the available funding and the implementation of the entire fire management planning framework.' As far as I can discern, there has been no output from this process.

Clearly, the process needs to be expedited, made to encompass the whole of the northern boundary of the TWWHA and adjoining lands, and managed so as to produce plans which can begin to be implemented within a realistic time, say the 2020 fire season.

Ken Felton, April 2016.