

7th January 2020.

Efficacy of past and current vegetation and land management policy, practice and legislation and their effect on the intensity and frequency of bushfires and subsequent risk to property, life and the environment.

To whom it concerns,

I am the owner of a 5 acre block of land at [REDACTED] in Garfield North Victoria. The block was purchased by myself as sole proprietor in 2007. There are no buildings or sheds on the block. The fencing is the standard 'post and wire' construction.

The front nature strip to the block is the property of the Cardinia Council.

The block is used to agist neighbours horses and ponies with a small monthly income to myself.

When I purchased the block the front nature strip was very dense with vegetation growth consisting variously of both native Australian and foreign trees (typically pine). The vegetation was dense to the extent that a person could not walk across or along the nature strip. Access to the front fence from the road was not possible due to the density of vegetation.

None of the other private properties in the vicinity of my property had a nature strip with the dense vegetation that I had. The neighbouring properties are inhabited with the usual private homes and sheds typical of a rural location. The nature strips of these private properties were nearly all clear of vegetation with largely only grass present.

Sometime after 2007 I purchased a chain saw with a view to clearing the nature strip to make it accessible and reduce the obvious fire hazard that it presented. The first time I used the chain saw I was immediately approached by a neighbour advising me that the Cardinia Council forbade clearing of nature strips and tree removals in the Cardinia area without their permission. The neighbour further advised me that illegal vegetation clearance attracted a large penalty in the vicinity of \$10,000. As a result of this advice I stopped clearing the nature strip.

I've since been advised that rate paying neighbours in the Garfield North area have been fined up to \$10,000 by the Cardinia Council for clearing vegetation with a view to fire proofing their properties.

As a result of the advice from the neighbour I rang the Cardinia Council who told me that no trees or other vegetation could be removed from the nature strip for 'environmental' reasons. I told the council that a number of the trees were foreign to Australia however I received the same reply ie. no trees could be removed to 'protect the environment'. I advised the council that the nature strip's vegetation was so dense that it was both inaccessible to the front fence and an obvious fire hazard. This did not change the advice I received from the Cardinia Council. I then asked if I could get rid of the fallen logs on the nature strip only to be advised that I could not remove them because insects lived in them, the example of 'slaters' was then given to me.

The nature strip remained heavily vegetated until March 4th 2019 when the Tonimbuk – Bunyip fires occurred in the area. The fire devastated nearly all of the fencing on my block including the front fence which was totally destroyed. The front nature strip was heavily burnt resulting in a number of trees being either totally destroyed or nearly totally destroyed.

I believe nearly 29 buildings including family homes were destroyed in the fire. No lives were lost.

Of all the properties in the immediate vicinity of my block, mine received the most damage as the fire was naturally attracted to the heavily vegetated nature strip. The large fire at the nature strip also caused the fences adjoining the front fence (ie. my two side fences) to be destroyed by fire. Again, my side fences were destroyed more than the neighbours due to the heavily vegetated front nature strip attracting the fire in the first instance.

For obvious safety reasons some of the fire damaged trees on my nature strip had to be immediately removed by the Cardinia Council using 20 tonne excavators and teams of council workers. Later on the gutters were re graded and the bitumen road re sealed. All this at a cost to the Cardinia Council and by extension the rate payers.

After the initial clearance of trees by the Cardinia Council I had to contact them to advise them that in my opinion (unqualified, I'm not an arborist) a number of the trees that remained were still not safe and should be removed. The Cardinia Council did re visit the block and remove a further quantity of large trees, again at a cost to the rate payers.

I was vindicated in contacting the council after the first removal of trees as after a short while a tree fell across the nature strip landing in the gutter. Luckily it did not land directly on and passing road traffic but it did require removal by the council as a potential hazard. The council did shift this fallen tree.

The trees from the second removal off the nature strip by the Cardinia Council were pushed onto my block of land where they were left for me to remove at my cost. This despite the fact that the trees belong to the Cardinia Council. These large removed trees remain on my block to this date.

Despite this, the Cardinia Council has still left a number of trees on my nature strip which I believe are dangerous to passing road traffic. Some of the trees are 80 – 90% burned but still have a few green leaves on them. The Cardinia Council considers these trees are not a danger and have left them. The council appear to be particularly adverse in tree removal despite the trees being largely dead and clearly a danger to the passing public. The Cardinia Council's reluctance to remove all fire damaged trees is disappointing in view of the fact that the trees attracted the fire in the first place.

The Cardinia Council have never, in the time I've been at the block, taken any steps to reduce vegetation on the front nature strip. Further, the council advised me that I could not take steps to reduce vegetation on the front nature strip. These two factors created the obvious fire hazard on March 4th 2019.

Financial assistance from the Cardinia Council for the damage caused by their trees to my fences and removal of same -\$0.

Cost to myself for fence replacement and lost income from agistment \$5,000 approximately and still rising to this date.

There is no particular financial concern on my behalf as I am reasonably well remunerated.

There are still large piles of burnt trees and assorted dead vegetation still on the block requiring further removal at a future cost to myself.

Special thanks should go to 'Blaze Aid' who replaced the front fence using volunteer workers and professional fencing equipment. This at no cost to myself beyond materials.

The fire damage to my fences was totally avoidable had the Cardinia Council allowed the nature strip to be reduced in vegetation to a reasonable extent.

I have no particular comments in relation to 'Green politics' infiltrating local council. I'll leave that to others to decide.

There are more people living in bushland and rural areas surrounding Melbourne. Local councils continual refusal to allow reasonable land clearance is incompatible with the genuine and reasonable safety concerns of local residents in these bushland and rural areas.

Conclusion: Captain COOK referred to Australia in his voyage of discovery as the "smoking country" due to the Aboriginal custom of clearing the land by fire to reduce vegetation and hunt etc. Why can't the Cardinia Council allow vegetation reduction?