

Submission on the January Bush fires

Since 2003, the frequency of bush fires per year has increased at an alarming rate of four times as many per year.

Due to global warming the increase in water vapour in the air has resulted in more lightning strikes resulting in an increase of bushfires.

This is likely to intensify in the next decade, lightning strikes can be expected to increase by 12%/degree of global warming.

Bush fires in Australia since 1960 killed 564 people, some of them volunteer fire fighters and it destroyed 9656 dwellings, killed 82500 livestock, destroyed miles of fencing, power lines and many farm and road vehicles.

The above indicates that It has therefore become very urgent that the existing volunteer fire forces in all regions should be complemented by a permanent federal fire and emergency trained task force (non-military) which can be deployed on very short notice with the help of satellite and conventional fire detection methods.

That force should consist of people, not trained in warfare, but regularly trained for emergency situations - personnel who can be dropped in to inaccessible areas by helicopter to commence firefighting when the fire is in its very early stage.

Military resources could compliment this permanent federal fire fighting force may the need to do so arise. Monies from the defence budget should be diverted to the purchase of water bomber aircraft and water crane helicopters to form part of that federal emergency task force.

Reading Lyndall Rowley article on the effects on health of bushfires and observing the voluminous responses to her article, "Zero tolerance of fires in Australia", it is obvious that the increase in bush fires in all Australian states is a genuine community concern.

Many elderly people in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania during the recent bushfires have been inhaling heavily smoke laden

air – in Tasmania for at least four weeks and this has no doubt been damaging their health.

Surely Tasmanian hospitals must have had a great increase in emergency cases resulting in admissions related to respiratory complaints.

Bushfires not only threaten world heritage areas but resources, property, infrastructure but also the health of its population in effected areas.

The inadequacy of the existing firefighting regime has recently been demonstrated by the evidence that the firefighting efforts were lengthy and making very little, or any impact at all on the raging bush fires in Tasmania, Western Australia ,Victoria and NSW.

Tony Abbot, as a Global climate warming denier said,” Australia has always had bush fires and always will.” So no further action is proposed despite the new available technology.

Never mind the underfunded and inadequate state firefighting regimes manned by part time volunteers - conservatism will romanticise the bushfire fighting inadequacies as a cultural inheritance.

Others will argue that we have always had bushfires in Australia because of Aboriginal food gathering practices and that the bush recovered from this in time.

To those holding that view I would say the following, the Aboriginal use of fire were low intensity burns without the danger of starting high intensity bushfires in Pine or Eucalyptus plantations.

Plantations have increased the danger of high intensity explosive bushfires which will need special attention considering the increased risk to lives and property.

The modern firefighting equipment now available should alleviate Australia from the curse of Bushfires.
