

Dear Senate Committee,

Having lived through bush fires in Western Australia, I know the speed with which such events can generate catastrophe. It is easy to be complacent, thinking that a river or lake will act as a firebreak. We saw a good example of how containment lines were by passed at Eaglehawk Neck this week. The narrow neck was controlled and the fire jumped the bay, almost 2 kilometres across open water and started a fire there.

In Derby, North East Tasmania, where I currently live and work, the amount of flammable material this year appears worse than in other years. Grass along the Ringarooma River remains long and unattended. On the other side of the river, around Bricies Hole (the former tin mine) dead wattles cover the area as well as Erica, long grass and brambles. The land adjoins forested areas and eucalypt plantations on all sides of the narrow valley that houses the town.

In 2007, following a clear fell exercise in the headwaters of the Ringarooma River, the resultant flooding damaged the Station Road Bridge. Instead of repairing the bridge, the council chose to remove it, taking away one possible escape route and leaving just two roads in or out. Both these roads are lined with dense bush and plantations.

The council has no budget to cut the grass along the riverbank and Crown Lands department has been told by the council that, despite requests from others, and me there is no need to do any fire prep work around the lake.

Last year, a fire started in long grass on the riverbank. After calling 000, the local fire brigade took more than 30 minutes to arrive. They are based in the town. By that time a neighbour and myself managed to put it out. It was 10:30 at night, a time when most people are asleep. If we had not acted, the fire would have burned the empty block next to our house and likely caught fire the empty courthouse. The ember storm could have set fire to other properties and the resultant disaster is unthinkable.

This year, again nothing has been done to prevent fires and so I have taken things in into my own hands to clear the vacant block behind the courthouse and a large part of the riverbank, at my own expense. There is so much complacency within the Dorset Shire, possibly because those who are charged with the duty of care have not experienced bush fires first hand.

The local fire brigades in these small towns are ill equipped to deal with run away vegetation fires, of the kind seen over the past few years. I fear that complacency; lack of proper training and under-sized hoses and pumps will result in disaster. Forestry Tasmania is insolvent, due to its involvement with Gunns. The resultant cutbacks mean a lack of forest fire trained personnel and equipment in rural areas.

There is a buzz at present about heritage listing the town of Derby. It is Tasmania's only remaining timber built town. The council found \$20,000 to get a report done but still has no budget for fire prevention works. If a bush fire were to strike here and destroy it that would be \$20,000 wasted, not to mention human and animal lives. There is no fire plan for Derby and some of us, who have lived through bush fires on the mainland, have made our own plans to evacuate. Packing certain valuables and food and having cages standing by for pets. This would be useless however, should the fire be burning at both ends of the town.

David Leigh.