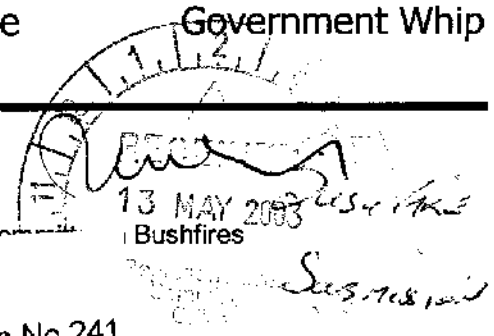


Hepher, John (J. Gash, MP)


13 MAY 2003
Bushfires
Sussex Inlet

From: Desmond Melville
Sent: Friday, 9 May 2003 3:11 PM
To: Gash, Joanna (MP)
Subject: Submission for consideration by Parliamentary Committee

Attention Lyn.

Submission No.241

As discussed per phone I have forwarded this submission to Joanna for onforwarding to the Parliamentary Committee convened to inquire into bush fires
SUBMISSION:

Brief History

The Shoalhaven is situated in one of the most bush fire prone areas on this planet. Wherever vast and dense stands of native vegetation occur, there is always the potential for major bush fires particularly, during the period October through to March and even more so in drought periods. Meteorological studies support that fires with the potential to wreak the most havoc are those high intensity fires fanned by hot dry winds coming from the West or Nor-westerly direction. However, the Shoalhaven is not precluded from the fact that strong winds from either the South or Northeast also have the potential to generate fires of high intensity. In somewhat inaccessible terrain and volatile vegetation, bush fires are a natural phenomenon which in the main are triggered by lightning strikes, but, one cannot overlook the fact that there are fires created by criminal act (Arson) or just plain carelessness on the part of humans.

This submission not only deals with our hamlets of North Bendelong, Bendelong, Manyana, Berringer and Conjurong Point but also takes into consideration the villages of Sussex Inlet to the North and Lake Conjola to the South. These villages have a common denominator in that they have a single access/ egress road and are bordered on three sides by National Park. Because of this, any or all three villages can be isolated for days, when under threat or are engulfed by fire as was the case in Sussex Inlet and Bendelong/Manyana.

The 2001/2002 bush fires whilst they did impact on our 5 hamlets, we were fortunate that we did not suffer the property/asset loss, damage or trauma that was suffered by villages to our immediate North. However, families had to evacuate their homes when they were under serious threat from fire on two separate occasions.

The loss of power for extended periods caused some loss of stored frozen foods. In addition the isolation created a shortage of essentials foodstuffs which necessitated their import by water. Then there was the revenue loss encountered by store and caravan park operators, plus the loss of income by those employees unable to get to their places of employment. One cannot overlook the Xmas holiday makers who had their annual holidays cut short or interrupted by the fires and the aftermath thereof were also losers. Although we were more fortunate than those to the North of us, it does not mean that we will be so lucky in future.

Bush fires causes - The contributing factors. The complete failure of the "Green" influenced National Parks and Wildlife Service (now National Parks) to carry out hazard reduction and fire prevention maintenance programs. The local government authority's failure to carry out hazard reduction on Crown reserves under its jurisdiction and its failure to require owners of future development lots to carry out any hazard reduction and provide an adequate buffer zone between these lots and residential areas. It was the burn on one of these lots that promoted the greatest threat to homes in our area.

Remedial Action:

The Rural Fire Authority to be the overall enforcing body
 Government Statutory Bodies, Local Government, Land holders and power Supply Companies to comply with directives issued by the R.F.A. as indicated:
 Maintain a continuing program of hazard reduction of forest fuels and creation of adequate buffer zones particularly where bush adjoins residential areas.

The creation of adequate corridors along access/egress roads and power lines

so that they are negotiable in most eventualities.

Causes and Risk Factors :

The "Green" lobby group's influence within in the National Parks Service and their preservation policies have no doubt contributed to N.P. neglect of hazard reduction.

It is evident that National Parks have a Preservation at all costs policy, when they ought to have one of Conservation. National Parks Preservation policy is a biased vision whereas they should be adopting a Conservation policy. A definition for Conservation is: HARMONY BETWEEN MAN AND LAND.

I support a withdrawal of all Federal grants to this body, should they continue with

their current policy

Insurance Coverage:

This is something that requires a complete overview with so many property owners or mortgagees failing to have adequate or in fact any insurance cover whatsoever on either house or contents. Too many seem to adopt the attitude that it won't happen to me and even if does happen I can rely on the generosity of my fellow Australians and Government grants.

In bush fire prone areas a compulsory insurance scheme similar to the 3rd party motor insurance would if implimented, provide the monies for replacement and cut out the need for fund raising and grants for victims of bush fires

Protection of Property in Bush Fire prone areas.

The R.F.A. should undertake an advertising campaign to make householders aware of the follies of failure to keep gutters clean and make them aware of consequences of application of leaf litter to garden beds in bush fire seasons. Furthermore they should advise the public of what can be achieved by blocking down pipes and filling gutters with water. This course of action has some merit and bears consideration.

The adequacy of deployment of firefighting resources:

With the vastness of bush fire prone areas we have now learned to rely on interstate help being available in times of need with volunteers from as far afield as West Australia being deployed to fire fighting duties on the Eastern Seaboard. It is now a common to see fire fighters and their equipment from interstate fighting fires in any State where the need arises The use of "Elvis" the giant water bombing helicopter and other aircraft in water bombing of fires has helped greatly improved fire fighting techniques particularly in inaccessible areas.

As a extensive part of Australia can be subjected to bush fire at any one time and it is high time that we started improving our equipment and purchase of an "Elvis" type fire fighting unit rather than would be a step in the right direction.

It is high time that the Federal Government took an active role in the purchase of the latest in equipment to meet Australian requirements and the co-ordination of

volunteer resources from outside the State under threat.

It is now a national concern and as such ought to have a far greater Federal Government involvement.

The role of volunteers:

The Australian Community at large have come to rely on volunteer organizations such Rural Fire Brigade and the State Emergency Service in times of threat and it is high time that the Federal Government stepped forward and assisted in compensating them for wages lost when performing their respective volunteer duties. These brave people who put their lives on the line for others are deserving of some reward other than a leather medal. Hope this measures up to the Committee's requirements

Regards

D.D. (Des) MELVILLE