

The Secretary of the Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires Submission No.185
PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Dear Sir or Madam, re: Recent Australian bushfires in KNP, Tumut Shire,
adjoining Shires and Canberra

This submission by myself is made on behalf of all present and future users of KNP. As a longtime user and explorer of KNP and adjoining State Forests and farming areas, as a former Tumut Central Bushfire Brigade Captain, bush walker, backpacker, skier, fisherman etc with over forty years experience in the area I make this submission regarding the recent fires to the committee.

In addition to the above I spent four years as a member of the NSW Section 23 Committee which advised the Minister for planning on many matters including fire control and over the last five years have spent hundreds of hours carrying out voluntary work in the Yarrangobilly area of KNP with members of Talbingo Bushwalkers Inc. removing pine wildings and restoring the once magnificent garden at Jounama Homestead

SUMMARY. The submission Consists of comments on a, b, c, d and e concerning the areas covered by KNP, Tumut and adjoining Shires and part of ACT. What I say may well apply to fires in other areas of which I have no local knowledge. Reference to sections f, g, h, i, and j I leave to others .

- a) The extent and impact of the recent fires have both been dramatically increased by the fact that NSW Government has created huge bonfires, which they are pleased to call Wilderness Areas and National Parks, without providing adequate funding for any of the major functions. Fire, Weeds, feral animals and access.
- b) Causes: Failure by NPS to carry out adequate fuel reduction, failure to provide and maintain adequate access trails and access to water. Failure of the ACT Bushfire Council to carry out adequate fuel reduction on the portion of land leased in the Brindabella Range while controlling it.

- c) Adequacy: Most of the areas burnt were once maintained during the summer months by over 300 station hands. Since snow leases were extinguished the same area is controlled by a few workers and a few rangers whose access to KNP is by 4 wheel drive vehicles!
- d) Land Management: Whole operation of land management and park policies appears to be dominated by theories and influence of several "Green" organizations. This was explained by the chairman of NSW Farmers Association, Gundagai District Council as, "too much influence by impractical theorists".
- e) Alternative bushfire mitigation: Some of the strategies and forest management practices of State Forests. Particularly those used in Bondo State Forest.

SOME EXPLANATIONS FOR THE ABOVE SUMMARY.

a) EXTENT AND IMPACT

1: The Extent and impact have been well documented but of concern is the fact that NPS (formerly NPWS), which has for many years been claiming to ensure that the bio-diversity and the best of our environment is protected as a gift for our children and our grandchildren, is now claiming that the fires are a wonderful part of the process of making our environment fire tolerant and what is happening is a "re-birth". Free bus trips inviting members of the community to view the re-birth have been organized. First items to appear in the re-generation were blackberry shoots followed by the ferns, eucalyptus pauciflora and other eucalypts. No mention is being made of the complete disappearance of fauna in most fire-devastated areas. One of the most endangered species as a result of the fires is eucalyptus delagatensis. Huge areas of this fire prone tree have been destroyed with very little potential for re-growth. Another re-birth which, although not mentioned, is the amount of fuel already on the forest floor such as leaves, fallen bark, sticks tree trunks which if not regularly disposed of is the beginning of future fires!

2: IMPACTS of the devastating effects of the fires have still to be experienced and will be for many years if not forever. As was discovered by the aborigines and early settlers, some flora will actually thrive as a result of fire but fauna may actually disappear completely as will some trees and shrubs. With the abolition of lower storey shrubs and greater access of sunlight wildflowers will thrive again. Because of drought conditions ashes, charcoal, soil erosion and runoff will, when heavy rains fall, flow into and clog the creeks and rivers, kill fish and crustaceans. At Wee Jasper an extremely heavy downpour has wrecked fences just re-erected after the fires.

b) CAUSES OF AND RISK FACTORS ETC.

1: Many important people have cited various causes for the fires. These have been ad hoc excuses that do not address the root causes. In fact these huge and devastating fires are now being hailed by NPS as the 're-birth'. Director Gilligan and fire Chief Koperberger made the statement early this year that fire control exercised by both NPS and Bush Fire Authority was the very latest, using the most modern technologies. These are outlined in the Independent Scientific Committee Document that is part of the Proposed New Plan of Management of KNP. The proposals made in this document have basically been made redundant by recent events. For example, fire regimes of 40 years for Snow Gums and 70 to 100 years for alpine ash forests are espoused. These fire regimes, because of factors beyond human control, are impossible.

2: Keith Muir, who was noticeably missing from any attempts to extinguish the bushfires and whose followers attempted to restrain bulldozers attempting to construct fire breaks around huts and who in Tumut and Adelong Times of 18/03/03 refers to the research of an '**Independent Scientific Committee**', which claims that past grazing/burning regimes increased fire hazards in the region. Actually the fire hazards were increased, by management, under the scientific regime to the extent that everything was destroyed. The Colong foundation made recommendations in wilderness submissions that all fire trails should be ripped and revegetated and that power transmission lines should be removed from the Park. It should be recorded that the power line reserves played a large part in control of the fires!

3: NPWS Southern wilderness Report, December 2000 page 135 quotes the following which may be a possible cause of Canberra fires, "*Severe fire seasons in 1920 and 1939 eventually lead to the 1944 leasing of an area of Brindabella Range to the ACT Bush Fire Council, so that it could be managed to reduce fire hazards and any associated risks to the urban area of Canberra. The leased area, with the substantial areas of natural vegetation it contains, forms the core of the area now gazetted as Brindabella National Park*". The question that arises here is why were the original leasing arrangements aborted?

4: The influence of the Colong Foundation in particular and other similar organizations may be factors in influencing some NPWS decisions which lead to the cessation of fuel reduction burns, increasing the size of Wilderness areas and track and trail closures. For example the Colong nomination for Restoration of the Goodradigbee Wilderness recommends: "*the removal of the perimeter road around Buccleuch State Forest. The road should be ripped up*

and revegetated with native plants". Similar recommendations were made for the Broken Cart Stock Route, Power Line Easements and management trails in Goodradigbee Wilderness. It is known that members of Colong Foundation on both the Kosciuszko Advisory Committee and the Advisory Council were able to prevent community concerns regarding fuel reduction burns reaching the Minister.

5: There is no question that over supply of fuel, enlargement of wilderness areas created a huge bonfire, which because of weather conditions, became unmanageable. Surplus fuel on the ground fed crown fires that created gas clouds ahead of the fire front. The gas clouds were ignited by sparks blown ahead and became unstoppable torrents of flame consuming all in their path. This accounts for whole fronts of homes igniting at the same time and some homes being missed. One reason for the build up of fuel is the Wilderness Act of which Bob Carr was the architect. *'the Act pre-supposes the primacy of the "biocentric" view on wilderness identification and management over the "anthropocentric" view'* This enables Park management and policy to avoid fuel reduction burns. The Act should be changed.

c) ADEQUACY AND ECONOMIC IMPACT ETC.

1: Adequacy and frequency of fuel reduction burns have been lacking for some years. Inadequate funding was one of the excuses. This may be so but the cost of bushfires of late years in the northern end of KNP has been enormous. Peppercorn fire; Talbingo fire about 1995; Talbingo 2000; Blowering fire 2002 have cost millions of dollars. The cost of controlling these fires would have more than covered the cost of adequate fuel reduction for the whole Park.

2: Given the publicity being given to the wonders of the **re-birth** one can only wonder why any effort is made to extinguish natural (lightening fires) when there is no threat to property other than the Park.

d) APPROPRIATE LAND MANAGEMENT POLICIES ETC.

1) It seems to me to be inappropriate that we have so many overlapping authorities that in some cases one authority should have full control. There are Local Bushfire Brigades, State Forest Bushfire Organisation and State Bushfire Control. Would it not be more beneficial to have one fire control organization for major fires?

1: Bago State Forest, which has been logged for over 100 years and is being logged in perpetuity, where re-growth alpine ash of over 70 years grows, is an example of sustainable

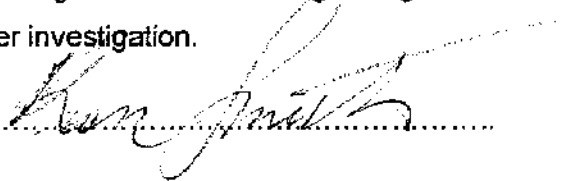
growth without fire. Logging disturbs the topsoil and provides an ideal seed bed for uncrowded re-growth. Check with State Forests.

2: The NPWS Director, during the worst period of fires made the statement, "*NPWS fire control strategies are equal to the latest in the world*". He appears to be unaware that USA has decided to log their wildernesses because logging does far less damage than do wildfires. We should consider doing the same. Log sales could provide essential funding for Park Management. The soil disturbance created forms a seedbed for future trees.

3: Latest German thinking on forest management involves logging of mature trees. This opens up the forest and allows sunlight to penetrate to the ground. This is beneficial to younger growth and prevents the build up of ground fuel.

4: Another forest management scheme is being considered in Germany. The aim is not to have huge bonfires similar to those the Government has created here but a patchwork landscape consisting of forests in all stages of growth. The size of each individual component is currently under investigation.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Smith", written over a dotted line.