

28<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## **Property Rights Australia Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements**

Property Rights Australia (PRA) was formed in 2003 to protect the property rights of those unfairly targeted by the Vegetation Management Act 1999. We are a non-profit organisation of primary producers and small businesspeople mostly from rural and regional Queensland who are concerned about continuing encroachments on the rights of private property owners. The organisation was formed to seek recognition and protection of the rights of private property owners in the development, introduction and administration of policies and legislation relating to the management of land, water and other natural resources. Set up in South West Queensland, PRA's membership now extends across most states and multiple major rural industries. PRA is not affiliated with any political party.

Property Rights Australia supports the extensive use of fuel reduction or hazard reduction. This can take the form of hazard reduction burns, grazing and any of the other accepted techniques.

We would however caution against a program which is set in stone as we are aware that long-unburnt areas will be extremely dangerous under certain unfavourable conditions.

Hazard reduction will however require rolling permits that cover a season and highly motivated fire teams who are ready to go at a moment's notice on favourable days. Some very overgrown areas will require livestock grazing and bare earth breaks before they can even be attempted.

Similarly, wanting to cover all areas regardless of ownership or status needs to be approached with caution. Those who must make their living off the land need to be able to have flexibility of harvesting and use or non-use of pasture without interference from outside authorities.

### **Green Tape**

Much of the severity of the fires was increased by Green Tape imposed at all levels of government.

What I have not noticed after two intense fire seasons, is any softening in attitude by the environmental movement and governments who listen to them. In fact, what I have seen from those who claim to support the environment is to blame those that they regard as not caring for it as culpable in the recent fires. They are shameless in trying to blame those whose expertise they have tried to discredit for decades.

No moves are being made to put effective firebreaks around national parks.

No effort is being made to restore long neglected fire trails in former forestry areas and national parks.

No discussion is taking place about removing flammable exotic weeds from government land including national parks.

In fact, in some areas such as Barrier Reef catchments, private landowners are being encouraged to retain their weeds as groundcover. The requirement for groundcover, any groundcover, is rated as more important than any other consideration including fire hazard and biosecurity.

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Regardless of any lessons we should have learnt from the fire season, both the Queensland and NSW governments have instituted koala priority areas where farmers will be forced to allow eucalypts to grow or in some cases to plant them even in cropping areas. If the fires should have shown us anything, even those who live in concrete jungles, it is that we have millions of hectares of eucalypts and that under the right conditions they burn right to the top of the trees and said koalas become roast koala.

What has been prominent has been the fundraising efforts of green NGOs to raise money for koala habitat restoration. I really am not sure what that money is meant for as the forests will inevitably naturally regrow long before any tree planting could occur. Inevitably the costs and carriage of these projects fall on farmers.

The style of management, or rather non-management, that occurs on government land and most particularly national parks is beautifully set up so that when there is a fire ignition, they will burn with severe intensity and destroy almost all wildlife. This style of management is being increasingly imposed on private landowners by governments whose agendas are being dictated by flawed and illogical green ideology in pursuit of the vote of remote conservationists whose practical knowledge is often close to zero. This community has mistakenly come to believe that environmental NGOs have a mortgage on environmental knowledge and have seen farmers demonised to have their voices silenced.

This slewed agenda has come at great cost to primary producers in reputation, in income and safety but also at a great cost to wildlife. That communities and governments can believe that the answer to saving koalas is to force farmers to grow more flammable eucalypts where they do not want them is almost too illogical to believe. There is no shortage of koala habitat. What it needs is management.

There is a lot of emphasis on “wildlife corridors”. Every time I read that I think fire corridors.

Even the Queensland Government’s Guide to the Weed Clearing Code advises landowners to break up continuity of fuels and to,

*“Commence burning early in the season and continue through the dry to break up continuity of fuels across the landscape. Invasive high biomass grasses can promote fire and increase severity. Variation in burn seasons and short fire frequencies promote bird diversity.”<sup>1</sup>*

Not all departments seem to agree.

*In NSW, it is illegal to manage forests sustainably using frequent mild fire. For example, health, safety and biodiversity can be maintained in eucalypt forests by mild burning every three to six years, whereas NSW's BFEAC [Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code] specifies minimum intervals of ten years between fires in dry shrubby forests and thirty years in moist shrubby forests. Virtually all eucalypt forests on public lands are shrub-invaded because of lack of mild burning and/or grazing. Moist, shrub invaded forests are wrongly classified as wet sclerophyll forests by National Parks and Wildlife Service and Rural Fire Service.*

*Inaugural RFS Commissioner Philip Koperberg, a strong advocate of prescribed burning, pledged that they would make it easier to burn. BFEAC [Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code] is supposed to have streamlined the approval process. That is not the situation described to me by people who have to work through the process. In any case, "acceptable" intervals between prescribed burns are those that will ensure environmental degradation*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.dnrme.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/1448465/managing-weeds-clearing-code-guide.pdf](https://www.dnrme.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1448465/managing-weeds-clearing-code-guide.pdf) p12

*and dangerous fuel loads. This suits cost squeezed public land managers, because everyday costs of management are reduced and firefighting is externally funded as disaster response.<sup>2</sup>*

Councils do not appear to have willingly lifted restrictions on the construction of firebreaks that go beyond state government restrictions. Nor do they appear to have made it easier to clear trees, particularly flammable trees such as eucalypts in close proximity to houses and other infrastructure.

In Qld at least there has been no attempt to increase government permitted firebreak widths which are considered highly inadequate. The permitted width is 10m on your side of a boundary fence and 20m or 1.5 times the height of the tallest tree adjacent to infrastructure. This is widely considered inadequate.

The main objects of codes on firebreaks and weed control are there to protect native vegetation and environmental processes. These must be changed so that their objects are to protect life and property from fire or we have learnt nothing.

To many fellow rural residents, it is obvious that the very best way to look after all wildlife including koalas is not to grow more trees but to ensure that those that are there have adequate management including hazard reduction, numerous firebreaks and fire trails, cleared areas to break up continuity of fuel loads and effective weed management.

## **Bureaucracy**

I have encouraged everyone who told me about bureaucratic disasters to make a short submission to this Commission. Some have but I will give an overview of some.

In Queensland Firecom, is the distant authority that rural volunteers and others need to report to.

When a fire starts in a semi-remote or remote area it is often rural volunteers who are first on the scene. I have had multiple reports from experienced volunteers who say that a small fire that they could have easily controlled and could have been put out in a small amount of time, they were ordered not to touch until the regular fire brigade arrived. By then the fire was much larger and often took days or even weeks to put out with consequent loss of pasture, crops and wildlife.

If this is in any way related to relevance of the professionals or funding based on size or intensity of fire, the parameters need changing. We will always have mega fires while there is funding available for suppression that is not matched by funding for mitigation.

Recently, in my local area, there were examples of experienced volunteers being denied permission from 1000 kms away to backburn<sup>3</sup> into an active fire to save houses. In one instance preparations were made during the day with heavy machinery used to make a break for a backburn to protect a house. The plan was, as is common practice, for the landowner to light the fire after dark when the weather had cooled. Permission was denied and the police were sent out to ensure the backburn did not take place with threats made, as was often the case, that if the fire was lit there would be arson charges laid. The next day could very easily have involved fatalities as the volunteers returned to find no backburn lit and the house in imminent danger. The volunteers found themselves in a firestorm with flying sheets of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=20834&page=2>

<sup>3</sup> When I refer to backburn it does not mean as hazard reduction burn as used by the media but the practice of burning off a break back towards an active fire.

roofing iron, one of which hit the heavy machine that was attempting to put out the fire. Vision of this was, and probably still is, available on facebook.

This all occurred in a Shire which has had extra restrictions on clearing trees and firebreaks above and beyond what is permitted under state government law.

The State governments themselves are often culpable with unrealistic restrictions on firebreak widths, their numbers and where they must be in relation to infrastructure. This is in a setting where vegetation is thickening, often uncontrollably, including on private land, as laws on vegetation clearing and thinning and even weed clearing are made more and more stringent.

In talking about the effectiveness of breaks in what is predominantly a grassfire, they say,

*A single tree close to a firebreak (within 20m) will decrease the effectiveness of the break even under relatively mild conditions. Many breaks are located close to tree-lined roads. These may be suitable for containing fires within the paddock, but will largely be ineffective in containing fires starting on the road verge. Where there is a serious problem with roadside fires starting in a tree-lined verge, either the verge should be burnt regularly prior to summer or a firebreak should be located inside the adjoining paddock some distance from the trees.<sup>4</sup>*

Please note that the Code in Queensland which covers firebreaks, and probably many other jurisdictions, does not allow for these steps to be taken. The code allows for a single 10m break along your side of and adjacent to the boundary fence and not, "some distance from the trees".

Many such breaks are constructed in forested country of various thicknesses which is not allowed to be touched.

The article allows for a fuel load of 4T/ha. The recent Summer fires had what was estimated to be 30-40 T/ha in many areas.

### **EPBC Act 1999**

The federal Department of environment also gets involved through the EPBC Act 1999.

There are matters of national environmental significance which the Act seeks to protect from widespread fire mitigation but it is not overly prescriptive. It should be possible to have a co-operative approach to fire mitigation.

During an active fire the federal act states that *"In the case of emergency bushfire suppression and containment activities, protecting life and property is always the overriding concern."*<sup>5</sup>

Further, *"National environment law generally does not restrict responses required to manage bushfire emergencies, nor does it regulate measures taken to fight fires."*<sup>6</sup>

If legal certainty is required the federal environment minister has the power to give an emergency exemption but this should not be routinely required.

### **The Demonisation of Forestry and Foresters**

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<sup>4</sup> Grassfires: fuel, weather and fire behaviour, Phil Cheney and Andrew Sullivan, CSIRO Publishing 2008

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/factsheet-bushfire-management-and-national-environment-law>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### **Fracturing**

*The two great social and political forces of environmentalism and neo-liberalism acted against the foresters and broke up their institutions from the 1970s. The foresters were startled when the environmentalists attacked them, and dismayed by the 'forest wars' against logging and pine plantations that dominated the media and gained political traction. Beneath these phenomena lay a deep fracture in the idea of forest conservation. The foresters' long drive to overcome deforestation and waste, with reservation and management was for them its essence. They saw nothing incompatible between reserving state forests for long-term use, making better use of Australian timbers, and reserving national parks for their scenic, recreational and natural values.<sup>7</sup>*

### **Stridency of the NGOs**

Foresters were ambushed and totally unprepared for, as other industries have since, by the stridency of the environmental movement and NGOs. They have been demonised for decades in spite of moving from wood production being their primary function to sustainable practices.

This has not been recognised as is the usual method of operation for environmental groups.

There are two conflicting strands between genuine environmental aims funding aims.

Firstly, there are environmental changes that do need to be made and foresters did recognise this and manage this.

Policy makers and the public need to recognise how much of the forestry wars reflect genuine environmental need and the clearly different strand which is about stridently and unrelentingly demonising, defaming and even lying about industries to drag them away from their own integrity systems and into the NGOs future income producing schemes.

NGOs have an imperative to raise money from donations both in Australia and overseas. Their other requirement, their quasi superannuation policy post donations, is to sign industries, a very great number of industries, to their certification schemes.

There is no room in this environmental and funding war for praise for a job well done, recognition of effort, nor economic cost imposed. Forestry has suffered more than most from this perceived need for two distinct sides to the battlefield with no room for co-operation or negotiation and any attempt at negotiation by the target industry is viewed as a surrender and a situation to be exploited. Forestry is by no means the only industry where discrediting and demonising is being effectively used. Other unsuspecting industries are also targeted.

The upshot is that public perception of forestry has become a largely negative one and dedicated forestry schools with tertiary qualifications have disappeared or become a not-well-regarded part of an environmental course with a bias towards ecology rather than economic industry.

Almost lost are the forestry skills and imperatives to keep forests maintained and safe. Also diminishing is the heavy machinery required to both mitigate and suppress fire.

The environmentalists are the new keepers of our forests.

They have done a very poor job.

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<sup>7</sup><http://oa.anu.edu.au/essay/17?fbclid=IwAR2SaRRQ2lm7wXP08vOyfUmc6uzCVaOKh1JpsyEXT4gZ0PY2XswabT1aP4c>

Their list of disasters is quite extensive but is gloriously capped off by the last two fire seasons where all the furry, cuddly creatures and not so cuddly ones in their care, were burnt to cinders over millions of hectares.

Have they taken any responsibility for poor management of their estate, poor environmental decisions and science, poor decisions, poor information given to government, misinformation pedalled to the public, ill-judged actions and poor planning of communities?

Not at all.

It is far easier to blame climate change.

### **Expertise**

This fire season, as if others should not have been enough, brings into stark relief the contrasts between policy as signalled by, and followed, by the green organisations and the experienced foresters, firefighters and farmers who have not only been not listened to for decades but vilified for their positions on fire safety and environmental responsibility.

This emphasis MUST change. I have seen scant evidence of change, and plenty that every environmental scientist who fancies himself as a fire expert has been commenting or supporting those who are commenting, in trying to discredit the knowledge of those who have a lifetime in the field.

The long-experienced expertise does exist but it must be recognised, respected and harnessed immediately as many are already retired or close to retirement.

This sentiment is reiterated by experienced and intelligent firefighter and forester Roger Underwood who puts a convincing case for fuel reduction. However, he has reservations.

*I would be optimistic that the pendulum might start to swing, and we might get to see a resurgence of effective fuel reduction all over the country .... if not for one other thing: the absence of sufficient numbers of trained, competent people to do the burning.*

*Overcoming the shortfall in numbers of people who can plan and execute a safe and effective fuel reduction burning program in the nation's parks and forests may prove to be one of the biggest barriers to getting bushfire management back on the rails in the short term. Nevertheless, it can be done, especially if a start is made now.<sup>8</sup>*

Dedicated education in forestry and fire management seems to have been abandoned. This Royal Commission must oversee its reinstatement while there may be people available who may be able to be educators. That there are specific lines of expertise that are being allowed to wither on the vine in our community will continue to be a fatal mistake, literally, again and again.

Such expertise includes people such as Phil Cheney, Mark Poynter, Vic Jurskis, Roger Underwood, David Packham and others. Our dedicated forestry schools have been closed down and our forestry areas, particularly native forestry areas have been either closed down and deserted bereft of management or are on

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<sup>8</sup> <https://quadrant.org.au/opinion/doomed-planet/2020/03/after-the-bushfires-what-now/>

a program to do so. Many have been turned into “lock up and leave” national parks with no fire breaks, no fire trails and no weed control. Without a dedicated platform for fire and forestry management experts, the “lock up and leave” philosophy and now the “regrow and plant” koala habitat even in farmland, will see a repetition of the recent intense fires. There has been no cut through of the idea that the very best way to save koalas and wildlife is habitat safe from intense fire.

This article by forester Mark Poynter on “Why Flawed Scientists are Creating Havoc In Forestry”<sup>9</sup> shows just what unfounded propositions he and others are up against and these instant experts are being listened to and lauded by some corners of government and the public. On the subject of an open letter he wrote,

*Amongst the 19 scientists were seven from overseas universities or institutions in Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand; while four of the 19 were marine scientists who would not be expected to have expertise in Australian forests. Those remaining signatories with potential relevance to the issue were mostly Tasmanian-based geographers and an ecologist.*

*The ‘letter’ itself was just a 10-line statement released to the media under the banner of the green-left think tank, The Australia Institute. The Institute has a long history of anti-forestry activism, exemplified in the ‘letter’ by three rhetorical statements about:*

- 1) logging supposedly increasing the fire hazard;*
- 2) plantations being able to supply all our hardwood needs; and*
- 3) that timber production is ‘heavily subsidised by our taxes’.*

All are either highly dubious or incorrect.

Further,

*During the huge 2003 fires in SE Australia, this philosophy [disturbance-averse management] was exemplified by the infamous line – “I’d rather see the bush burnt than buggered” – uttered by a senior park manager opposing plans to contain the fire by constructing a dozed firebreak in the Alpine National Park. By not employing this tactic, significantly greater areas of the park were ultimately burnt.<sup>10</sup>*

If newspaper reports are anything to go by, this is a mirror image of what happened on Kangaroo Island. Reports indicate that the fire was contained on the NW corner of the island for about two weeks but putting a blade through the brush (in other words a bare earth break which may also have been useful to light a backburn from) was forbidden. Predictably, the wind changed and the result is history.

The concept of the benefit of cool burns and hazard reduction is universally not accepted by the environmental movement up to, including and following this season’s wildfires. Rather than regarding fire as a disturbance” Vic Jurskis and others have a contrary view.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.timberbiz.com.au/opinion-mark-poynter-on-why-flawed-scientists-are-creating-havoc-in-forestry/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

*Fire ecologists typically view long-unburnt treatments as 'controls' and report differences between them and repeatedly burnt areas as 'impacts' of burning (Jurskis 2003). Thus, fire is inappropriately viewed as a disturbance, and exclusion of fire is not recognised a disturbance.<sup>11</sup>*

The point is made repeatedly and over several parameters that a forest from which fire is excluded is not necessarily a healthy ecosystem.

*Dense shrub layers have been erroneously portrayed as a natural feature of forests that were originally grassy (e.g. Keith and Bedward 1999; Henderson and Keith 2002; Keith 2004). This has happened because ecologists have failed to recognise exclusion of fire as a disturbance to fire-dependent ecosystems (Jurskis 2002, 2003).*

Retired CSIRO scientist David Packham OAM has been outspoken about excessive fuel loads and has put metrics around the intensity of fires. He, among many others, is adamant that fuel load is the only parameter in a fire which we can control and in many places it is out of control.

Suppression measures, even the very photogenic large planes, DC-10s and 747s, can only extinguish fire up to about 3,000 kilowatts per metre. The huge conflagrations that we have had in the last fire season were commonly an estimated at 30,000 kilowatts per metre quite possibly up to 70,000 kilowatts per metre or more.

*According to the [Australian Academy of Science](#), the intensity of a bushfire is described in terms of the number of kilowatts of energy released per metre of the fire front. A controlled hazard-reduction fire usually releases less than 500 kilowatts per metre of energy, while an extreme bushfire can generate more than 100,000 kilowatts (the same amount as a medium sized electricity generating unit) per metre.<sup>12</sup>*

- *Fire intensity less than 800 kW/m can be suppressed with hand tools with water support as a direct attack*
- *Fire intensity less than 2000 kW/m can be suppressed by machines, tankers and water bombers as a direct attack*
- *Fire intensity greater than 2000 kW/m may be suppressed by machines, tankers and water bombers using an indirect attack*
- *Fire intensity greater than 3000 kW/m is unlikely to be suppressed<sup>13</sup>*

The Australian Academy of Science states categorically that a fire greater than 3000 KW/m cannot be suppressed.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jurskis 2003

<sup>12</sup> <https://aemo.com.au/en/news/bushfire-intensity>

<sup>13</sup> <https://aemo.com.au/en/news/bushfire-intensity>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.science.org.au/curious/earth-environment/how-we-fight-bushfires>

Metrics are something that the green movement never takes note of and seems to regard every fire as the same, with the same consequences as every other fire.

### **History Repeating**

Many historical inquiries and submissions to inquiries have had common themes. Some of their recommendations such as improved communications, the need for more accurate mapping either have improved or are improving.

Hazard reduction is one that is absolutely obvious and that it is still under discussion is sheer negligence.

The undoubted need for a sufficiency of firebreaks both in number and width is obvious even for hazard reduction. Another is the need for wide well-maintained fire trails. How many of the deaths in the recent fire season were from falling trees?

In reading historical submissions, the resistance to any sort of fire safety by those in charge of national parks and former forestry areas turned into national parks is obvious. I even came across one submission to the Snowy River Fires Inquiry in 2003 which claims that a fire trail cut during the fire was “rehabilitated”. There should be a clear direction that all fire trails be maintained for fighting fires.

### **Conclusions**

With so much expert advice and commentary on fire prevention, stretching from the academic, scientific, forestry, rural firefighters and landowners who live with fire every summer, why has there been such a romance with environmental/green groups who have been listened to by federal, state and local governments and those who live in concrete jungles?

That the hard environmental approach is wrong is longer a matter of conjecture or opinion. We need to stop listening to the romantic ideals of “lock up and leave”, more bush is always better, and the closer to our homes and communities better still.

For those who live with fires, this is not theoretical. Their lives and livelihoods depend on getting their actions right.

We need to start listening to the decades long experience of our firefighting foresters and scientists. If we continue to ignore them while paying homage to the green gods we are destined to burn over many summers.

I love this comment by an anonymous Jane in the Herald Sun. She is correct on all points. Not only is she factually correct but her comments reflect the frustration of someone who is part of a community who have been trying to express concerns over a long period. I empathise with her and have felt her frustration.

**Jane** 3 months ago 12/11/19 Herald Sun comments

*Bushies have been warning councils and governments for years but, each of those organisations being city centric they, as is so often inferred, know so much more than us yokels.*

*Bear in mind also people, we've been decrying the death of the (renewable resource) timber industry. Not just because it created work for us yokels and supported regional economies but because they put trails into, and maintained said trails, that the RFS frequently used to get into otherwise inaccessible country.*

*I'm buggered if I know why I'm bothering AGAIN to bring this up during fires because I know damn well that it's nearly time for the media to refirect [sic] your attention to something more titillating.<sup>15</sup>*

Environmentalists seem to be in denial about the usefulness of heavy machinery, both before a fire and during an active fire and the fact that with the demise of forestry and agricultural thinning and the fact that it is becoming scarce. This will not bode well for future mitigation and suppression efforts.

At the moment all projects are evaluated for environmental impacts. This needs to be put behind fire safety evaluations and environmental concerns need to go down the list of non-economic evaluations.

The dominance of the environmental philosophy above all else must stop. Sensible steps to make our communities safe must not only be permitted but actively encouraged.

In considering the "let it burn attitude" of the environmental movement, it seems to me the height of hypocrisy that fire teams at great risk to themselves, were parachuted in to save the Wollemi Pines. If "lock up and leave" is their belief, a conflagration will eventually be inevitable and they should bear responsibility for the consequences including the loss of environmentally significant flora and fauna.

## **Climate Change**

I am loath to bring up the subject of climate change as one is immediately labelled. I will try to use the metrics that I believe in but are lacking in most environmental discussions.

Australia, with 1.4% of greenhouse gas emissions cannot alone reverse climate change. It certainly cannot do it by next fire season no matter what steps they took. This appears to be what many members of the public believe. They have not been disabused of that belief by any of those responsible for it. That the public who are in no position to make a judgement on this issue in relation to fire have been deceived is reprehensible.

Even over ten years of severe emissions reduction we will not change climate.

The calls for many more firefighting aircraft for this fire season was a case of too little too late. As the Australian Academy of Science has pointed out in no uncertain terms. Fires above 3,000 kilowatts/m cannot be suppressed. Our summer fires were multiples of that intensity. Fighting them was exacerbated by too few unvegetated areas to fight from, either to slow the fire down or to backburn from. This involves lighting a fire off a bare earth break into the oncoming conflagration, one of the few methods which may be successful with a fairly intense fire according to the Australian Academy of Science.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/andrew-bolt/fuel-buildup-so-lethal-that-were-looking-at-1000-deaths/news-story/d36fe3bd6e095e13a637c3fa26b85e2c>

Meanwhile, we should be listening to the genuine fire experts, those with decades of practical rural experience. We should be reducing fuel loads and getting rid of flammable vegetation close to buildings and around villages and communities.

Local government regulations which have prevented this need to be thoroughly weeded out. Individuals need to take responsibility for keeping areas around infrastructure clear.

Ill-placed discussions about climate change are a distraction and have deflected from the discussion and resources necessary to take required actions to prepare for next summer.

I have not seen much evidence of preparation other than by those people who always prepare such as agricultural landowners.

Even in the recent Queensland Local Government elections I saw little evidence of many prospective councillors campaigning on increased fire safety even in areas where there were catastrophic Summer fires.

### **Carbon Farming**

The calls for our forests to be left “intact” and untouched are misguided if fire is what we are trying to prevent. Surely, this fire season has thrown into sharp relief that unmanaged forest is a fire hazard.

Large swathes of untouchable unmanageable land just become yet another fuel bed for even more uncontrollable fires.

Government land is already a danger point. Farmers do not need more large areas that they cannot manage close to them.

Many of the farms that have been purchased for carbon farming are unmanaged and are in danger of becoming as big a threat to farming neighbours as government owned and unmanaged land.

### **The Debate Substitute**

In almost all quarters, debate, even debate based on evidence, has become an unacceptable activity.

If one happens to have an opinion which is not 100% aligned with the most powerful player or players, there is a dictionary of words which substitute for research and rebuttal. Some seem to have originated with the climate change debate but have very easily slid into the lexicon of debate between environmentalists and foresters, environmentalists and fishers, environmentalists and irrigators and most specifically environmentalists and livestock producers.

The weaker and more financially challenged the group the better, and the more name-calling and insults hurled, the more fake science presented, the less necessity for real, unbiased research which may show that they are wrong.

If this Royal Commission does not listen to those with experience in forest fire mitigation and feet on the ground rather than the green interlopers who are all romance and no substance and ensure that fire safety at all levels is implemented, we as a country need to be thoroughly ashamed of ourselves.

Fire is too dangerous to be subjected to spin.

## Recommendations

- 1) Immediately reconvene tertiary institutions such as ANU Department of Forestry, removing pure academics from the Fenner School at ANU, and populate the Forestry schools there plus at the Southern Cross University and Creswick, University of Melbourne with courses on forestry and hard rural firefighting NOW before it is too late and there are no suitably experienced people to teach. There were 11 years of research in the Bushfire CRC, (2003 to 2010 and 2010 to 2014) which is as applicable now as it was when. Urban fire chiefs need not apply.
  - 2) That all governments in all states at all levels immediately move towards implementing hazard reduction under favourable conditions. In some areas that have not been burnt for many years this may require fuel reduction by other means such as livestock grazing before a fire is set. We are aware that this will require a very great deal of experience and skill.
  - 3) That all levels of government in all states immediately remove impediments to landowners clearing effective firebreaks, fire containment lines and taking steps to protect their homes and property. Details of suitable fire breaks for grasslands can be found in the excellent publication "Grassfires. Fuel, weather and fire behaviour" by Phil Cheney and Andrew Sullivan , second edition (CSIRO 2008).
  - 4) That steps be taken to ensure that communities do not have just one way in and the same one way out. These roads need to be wide and clear. Sometimes that will mean the alternate route is through a national park.
  - 5) That national parks and other government land construct firebreaks around their property.
  - 6) That national parks and other government land repair existing fire trails and construct appropriately spaced grids of fire trails in large areas.
  - 7) That flammable exotic weeds on government land be managed.
  - 8) That bureaucratic procedures are reviewed so that all fires are dealt with in as timely a manner as possible rather than waiting until it is out of control.
  - 9) That bureaucratic procedures are reviewed so that volunteer rural firefighters who have experienced team leaders not be prevented from undertaking accepted practice such as backburns where they judge they can save homes or property including crops and pasture without being vetoed and threatened by a distant authority.
  - 10) That bureaucratic procedures are reviewed so that available resources are not wasted.
  - 11) Rural and Urban fire brigades and their management are inherently different. Rural Fire Brigades need to be able to make decisions at a regional level by those who are committed to the protection of their communities.
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Regards

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