

From: cheryl oates
Sent: Monday, 29 April 2019 8:35 PM
To: AFAC Review (DPFEM)
Subject: Tasmanian Bushfire Review 2018/19

To Whom It May Concern,

We would like to voice our opinions and concerns associated with the Management of the 2018/19 Bushfires in Tasmania.

1. Everyone knows that fires start from dry lightning strikes and in some cases this occurs in remote and protected areas. The fire in the Central Highlands should have been stopped while still contained in the Protected Area. There appears to have been a reluctance to use heavy earth moving equipment at an early stage. Getting water to the fire in an area known for the number of Lakes and Lagoons should not have been a problem. Using the chopper in that area would have been far more effective than what it was in the Forested areas further down. However, water tanker's being able to gain access following a dozer would have been more cost effective and useful.

2. The Community messaging and warnings were totally misleading and in some cases incorrect. We found that we had been advised that the fire was going to impact on our property from a north-westerly direction which we made preparations for, when in fact, due to the lack of response and local knowledge from the TFS we was impacted from the south-west. The information that was given out on the television news in some cases was totally incorrect and information given out by the TFS on road closures at a Public Meeting at Miena was a total fabrication of the truth. On one news bulletin ten of us at Penstock Lagoon were rescued by Parks & Wildlife. We did observe them on the particular day, when this was supposed to occur, looking at the trout swimming in the Penstock Canal.

3. After the fire had effectively entered into the more Forested areas the opportunity had been lost to control it. Although we had asked for some assistance when the fire first passed our property and we had been putting out the perimeter of it, ourselves, we received none from the TFS. They were just interested in chasing the fire front and not mopping up behind and what was effectively happening was the fire was still creeping back well behind the front of a night and then when the wind came up next day, off it would go again. While protecting people's lives, by placing the area in lock down, we found that we were unable to obtain fuel and supplies for us to continue to fight the fire on our property and adjoining properties and even though we had offer's of assistance the people weren't allowed in and as far as the destruction to some of our forest and our fencing and our old 1800's house remains go, apart from our own efforts to defend these, the TFS response was totally zero.

4. There has been very little done in the area of the Central Highlands bush fire to reduce fuel load. One nearby farmer does some burning but a couple of years ago, one of her fires got onto another property and of course there was the usual threats of prosecution and of course in the protected areas there are never any reduction burns because a small minority, pumped up by the media, object.

5. One of our main problems was that the fire was not managed by local command. For quite some time the local fireman did not know what was happening because the Northern Command was running things and would not pass on information and did not even call them

out. Even the Police were in disarray as the new local Policeman had no idea about the district as he had only been here for a few days, so they brought the old one back but, of course, he could only do his shift. I had an incident where I asked one of the brigade from Ravenswood where he was going and he said he didn't know because he was told to follow the fella in front of him. Also to firemen from Launceston turned up at our house and were lost. They had a map but they were five kilometers off the side of it. They did offer to help and I showed them where there was a small fire burning and a water source. They said they would put it out and then come back to where we were fighting the fire and assist us. I did not hear from them again so I went to see how they had gone with the fire but they had nicked off, without telling us, and that little fire eventually crossed Central Lakes Road at Hunterston.

6. It appears that pride may have got in the way of the TFS requesting more resources from Interstate. I have been informed by a former Interstate Head of Government Agency that we only had to ask and there could have been a significant number of tanker's from Interstate available immediately.

7. Our observation of the helicopter's was mixed. Some were effective and some were not. Once the fire was in the Forest the effectiveness, of all the aircraft, was limited. However, if there was a significant attack on the fire at ground level with personnel and machinery, especially in the lower foliage area there use would be a lot more effective. The aircraft are unable to put out the fires in the large old growth trees because of their canopy and all the holes in the trees that the fire penetrates causing the tree to eventually fall over restarting more fire.

Other Concerns which affected the area.

Road closures: We found that some of the road closures were totally unnecessary because the fire was nowhere near them and the TFS was not using them. All it succeeded in doing was making people have to travel, miles out of their way, to get supplies and increase traffic on minor roads and cause hassles for the people living in the unaffected areas.

Rorting: We observed firebreaks being pushed in areas where the fire had passed and was already out. We noted on our own property a dozer turned up, made a hell of a mess, and we already had the fire out. On a property that we manage there were the same actions taken with sections of Forest pushed over where it had already been burnt.

Property Accesses: We offered to unlock all the boom gates on the Waddamana Road which are owned by Waddamana Forestry and Forestry Tas. and Transend but nobody was interested. They just pushed tracks around them which had to be reinstated. This has also turned into an issue because this has taken two months to get some action and there has been a lot of stealing and trespassing on the property.

I think, in our view, the fire fighting effort being controlled off site is hopeless. It appears the TFS needs fire controller's with experience fighting bush fires and fires in the country side and more dedicated staff who can work flexible hours. Bush fires don't burn from 9 to 5. Also when there is a fire like we have just had there should be some consultation with the property owner's who live there and know the area and the local weather characteristics.

Being an ex council Works Supervisor/Manager observing what went on during the Central Highlands fire was rather comical. Captain Mannering and Bazil Faulty would have done a better job.

Regards,

Greg & Cheryl Oates,