

From: John Gunn
Sent: Tuesday, 7 May 2019 7:18 PM
To: AFAC Review (DPFEM)
Subject: Re: Terms of Reference for the Review of 2018-19 bushfires

Dear Dr. Novac, in response I would like to submit the following which I hope will be taken constructively.

REPORTING: In high summer timing can be critical and I would suggest airlines be asked to report remote outbreaks for investigation as with numerous flights they would

be first to observe .

RESPONSE: If urban fires can be acted upon very promptly, why are any fires in critical conditions and locations not acted upon with similar haste? Surely an initial cost is better than a prolonged one.

DECISIONS: In critical weather surely somebody should be in a position to make a decision and have authority to immediately mobilise a response i.e. day or night and certainly not to have to worry about chain of command. At that time of year as many are on holiday, at least reserve operative should be available to proceed.

In the time of the Rural Fires Board, most were volunteers with intimate local knowledge of particular areas.

In contrast to the 2018_19 fires it seems many at headquarters had little or no local knowledge, it takes more than map reading to gain that. Perhaps a suggestion would be to have area committees to appoint suitable persons to be on call for fast response

CONTROL: Would it be better to have fire control by 2 statewide bodies i.e. urban and rural with back up support each way if and when required.

This would allow for S.E.S. and P.W.L.S. to be relieved of fire duties unless called for.

As a criticism S.E.S. were around Miena 7030 constantly in new vehicles and rarely seen to do anything constructive. e.g. While monitoring a fire pump with fire imminent I was approached 3 times in 2 days, asked the same questions i.e. full name, address, d.o.b. number of occupants housed, all noted, but in contrast to volunteer fire brigades, no question of offer of assistance. Question is why were they there and what became of the triplicate information?

P.W.L.S. seem to generally have a position of no fires. Why not limit them to patrolling camp sites and incidental outbreaks which they are well equipped to do. They rarely seem to support sensible back burns or cool season reduction.

REMOTE ACCESS: During the 2019 fires esp. in the Miena Bronte area, some old bush tracks were re opened for 4x4 access and no doubt more were formed. Unfortunately, after the fire many of those tracks were closed by excavating deep ditches or placing rock fill at the entrance. Surely they are better left open and even maintained for future use, they will certainly be needed at some time. If the 4x4 convoy groups want to trash the sensitive areas, then put up a gate with keys readily available for real purpose. A gate costs a few hundred dollars, but the cost of loading and unloading an excavator when in a hurry to clear maybe a dozen or twenty tracks is a bit different. e.g. TAS. Forestry in its day and many larger farm properties kept and maintain access tracks for fire control and other general access purposes. Surely crown land is worth monitoring and managing as well.

CENTRAL PLATEAU: Grazing was ceased in much of the area during the 1960-1970's. Large areas that had been maintained as grassland for over 100 years by selective cool burning are now so overgrown with scrub to the point that a summer fire would not only be difficult to control, but because of intense heat generated from such a canopy, would seriously degrade the thin layer of very sensitive soil. There are huge areas which show permanent damage from previous wild fires. Some burnt in the 1960-61 fire show erosion and degradation which will take a very long time to recover, if ever. I am always available to take interested parties to this area to see first hand what uncontrolled fires and bad management can do.

Without the input of graziers to manage the vegetation would it be prudent to implement a system of cool season grid burns at say 15 or 20 year intervals? Such a system could even be used to train and maintain a rural fires unit. After all in Scotland many hillside grouse moors are burnt in 1 or 2 hectare lots about every 5 years, the fire has no hope of escaping over a green neighbour.

EQUIPMENT: Criticism has been levelled at government for lack of funds for equipment. I was staggered to see the amount of equipment amassed in my area recently, some privately held and under contract or loan, and most held by the fire service, but unfortunately some awaiting direction.

However, I do query the type of fire units in use. About the 23 Jan. 2019 I was privately patrolling a fire perimeter which had been brought under control when I noticed a small fire had started beyond the break. I quickly found 2 fire crew who promptly brought their Landcruiser over. The senior operative walked ahead to attend a further outbreak. I then offered to roll out 20 metres of hose from the tanker to douse the fire, 30 litres would have done it, but was told that the water was for their personal protection. Meanwhile the senior op. equipped with mobile phone and uhf called up about 6 more land cruisers from on standby in the vicinity to attend the outbreak he went to. That fire was about 2 ha. in area, protected by a break several kilometres wide to the west and about 100 metres wide opposite. Before the land cruiser team could get started, 2 helicopters arrived and continued to totally bomb the fire. About a few minutes only from the lake 1 km. away between drops. **FULL MARKS FANTASTIC EFFORT.** I think I would have quietly patrolled the fire with one truck and let it burn right out. It was totally enclosed by burnt ground, the weather had cooled and no wind.

With the large number of Landcruisers available, and they certainly are a useful vehicle, but, like any have their limits, I query the choice. If they are to be used largely for reconnaissance, carry 1 or 2 passengers and 1000 litres of water [to be used for personal protection], would 4x4 trucks able to carry 3000 to 5000 litres, 2 passengers, or optionally 5 passengers, cost marginally more, be a more useful unit? If so they could then be equipped with purpose built low profile tanks with baffle plates, to prevent the odd roll over from using typical cylindrical high centre of gravity units?

BACK BURNS: WHY THE RELUCTANCE?

As an example a very well executed burn was conducted by T F S and one or several volunteer units notably the Barton [Campbell Town] unit. The preparation was text book work, protection hard against several dwellings at the west end of Robertson rd. Miena 7030, and lit in stages along about 1 km. front and it rapidly burnt, as fire does uphill, to meet the previously burnt area a few hundred metres above. All over in no time. The plan was made, wind was light behind the fire, decision

made, job done. BUT IF that back burn had been delayed by a few days, the next approaching fire still some distance away, would almost certainly have lit that area and with the wind behind it I think some quite serious property loss would have occurred . I conclude by stating that with better strategy in many areas, despite lightning strikes,the fires from Pine Tier area could have minimised considerably, but thanks to the efforts of those concerned and the eventual weather change , disaster was avoided. I seriously hope that hindsight is used fully and that this enquiry does what it is intended to do.

On a lighter note, the 2 gentlemen who were jointly named Australians of the year after the Thailand cave rescue, said in their award acceptance speech that too many of us are not prepared to take risks. My belief is that we should be applauded for taking on challenge, not overruled by some of the now out of control o h and s rules.

Yours W.J.[John] Gunn

N B Previous experience has included a 5 year stint as fire warden under Rural Fires Board from 1965 and further similar position from 1976 to 1983 In that time we engaged at least 4 major outbreaks,1 only loss of life but much property damage. It is pleasing to note how well equipped we are now and I look forward to good and sensible outcomes. J.G.