

## **Review into Tasmanian bushfires 2018/2019.**

### **Submission by:**

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Dear Review Panel

This is my submission for the Tasmanian 2018/2019 bushfire review. Whilst I have not addressed the Terms of Reference directly, I would like to make my submission via the following points:

I would like the review team to especially focus on why there were delays in controlling these fires with a sufficient response while they were small and manageable.

The amount of land burnt in the 2018/2019 bushfires is comparable to the largest fires Tasmania has experienced since European settlement.

This situation may have been avoided if the response by the government services including the Tasmanian Fire Service, the Parks and Wildlife Service, and Sustainable Timbers Tas had been faster and more effective when the fires were still small.

In 2016 the attitude by these government services to the fires which began in remote areas was to let them burn until they posed a threat to areas deemed to be of high value (ie houses etc).

This resulted in many small dry lightning strike fires in the Tarkine joining to burn a vast area, and the fire at Lake Mackenzie coming close to destroying the Walls of Jerusalem National Park.

The inquiry held after the 2016 bushfires recommended that the Australian Government:

“Recognise that climate change has increased fire conditions in south-eastern Australia and the risk to natural and cultural values in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area”. (Recommendation 1, 2.45)

Conditions in the summer of 2018/2019 were known to be extremely dry, creating the potential for large fires to occur again. Although the response was quicker than in the 2016 fires, it still was not rapid enough to prevent the South West (Gell River, Mt

Anne, etc), Huon Valley, Great Lake area, and Zeehan area fires from getting out of control and burning very large areas.

This lack of rapid response created a massive increase in the amount of damage and costs related to the fires, such as:

- The economic cost of prolonged fire fighting
- Damage to the wilderness environment
- Loss of business in tourism, farming, forestry and other businesses
- Death and suffering to animals and threatened species
- Loss of property
- Injury and potential loss of life to firefighters and the public
- Health effects on residents from many weeks of heavy smoke

The firefighters themselves are not to blame; they are doing an exceptional job in a very dangerous situation.

However those in management and control positions responsible for assessing and responding to fire risk did not react quickly enough to the initial dry lightning strikes, despite the lessons learnt in 2016.

If it is generally accepted that climate change will continue to create high fire risk weather, then there is the potential for these conditions to reoccur in years to come.

It makes far more sense to implement effective firefighting strategies in advance, than to fail to act and suffer the environmental and economic costs of the continued burning of such large areas of land.

The potential for the 2018/2019 fires to get out of control should have been foreseen, and all necessary practices put into action to prevent this situation.

The review should specify recommendations such as:

- Adequate funding for experienced firefighters, especially remote areas teams.
- Adequate funding for equipment and resources for both aerial and ground crews.
- Close monitoring during predicted high fire risk weather conditions, specifically immediate assessment during dry lightning storms, and the deployment of urgent responses especially to strikes in high fuel load/dry areas.
- Having firefighters and equipment on standby in high fire risk areas at high risk times in order to implement rapid response, rather than deploying resources after fires have become established.

Please refer to the ABC TV Catalyst video link below which clearly illustrates the devastating effects on vegetation that does not recover after fire events, eg pencil pines during the 2016 fire at Lake Mackenzie on the Central Plateau.

Also, the ABC article 'Slow regrowth in Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area after devastating bushfire' demonstrates how this area showed no signs of recovery one year later for the fire intolerant species.

#### **Attachments:**

- ABC TV Catalyst science show April 5<sup>th</sup> 2016: Effect of 2016 fires on threatened flora.

<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/4437596.htm>

- ABC article: 'Slow regrowth in Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area after devastating bushfire', 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-29/tasmania-wilderness-world-heritage-area-one-year-after-bushfires/8220918>

- 2016 fire inquiry: Responses to, and lessons learnt from, the January and February 2016 bushfires in remote Tasmanian wilderness:

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