



The Bushfire Front Inc

Motto: *Mild Fires Tame Wildfires*
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The Chairman
Tasmanian Bushfire Inquiry
Hobart, Tasmania

Dear Sir,

The Bushfire Front is an organisation dedicated to prevention of bushfire disasters. Our background and expertise is in bushfire science and practical bushfire management on the ground.

We are familiar with the Tasmanian situation and Tasmanian ecosystems, but not as intimately as will be others from Tasmania who will make submissions to this inquiry. Rather than comment in detail on the fires, we will present the basic principles of bushfire management in Australia. These apply universally.

1. The Tasmanian environment is bushfire-prone. This is a result of the Mediterranean climate, the flammable vegetation and the constant sources of fire, either natural or human caused.
2. Bushfires will always start. They will start somewhere in Tasmania every summer, without fail, and ignition cannot be prevented.
3. Fires will be difficult to control and will do damage according to three main factors: the weather, the fuels and the effectiveness of response/control measures.
4. Serious fires and fire damage will occur when the weather is hot, dry and windy, when fuels are heavy, and when response is slow or difficult, or where response is impossible.
5. Bushfire control/response **will always fail** when these three factors occur simultaneously:
 - heavy fuels (resulting in intense fire behaviour, crown fires and long distance spotting);
 - multiple fires (which dilutes the response, confuses priorities and often ends in chaos); and
 - difficult access for firefighters (which leads controllers to rely on water bombers which are ineffective against high intensity forest fires).
6. Fire control **always has a higher chance of success** when:
 - A proportion (up to 50%) of the landscape is carrying light fuels (less than 10 years old);
 - Headfires can be run into light fuels (0-1 year old); and
 - Long distant spotfire generation is minimised.
7. The presence in the landscape of low fuel areas is especially important in a multiple fires situation. This allows fire controllers to triage their response: fires that must be tackled now; fires that can be left until tomorrow or the next day, and fires that you can forget about altogether. The triage is not possible when all fires are burning in heavy fuels, with no light fuels ahead of them.
8. A fire management system that depends on post-fire response succeeds only in the urban situation, or in some highly developed agricultural areas where only grass fires occur. Fires in bushland/forest burning under very mild conditions (damp fuels, flat topography) and where they are easy and rapid

access can also usually be successfully controlled. However, the response-dependent system **will always fail when needed most**: when there are multiple intense fires in forest or bushland.

9. Blaming the bushfire problem on climate change is futile. If climate change is real and is leading to hotter, dryer weather, it only means that efforts to minimise large intense bushfires must be redoubled. Prevention of large, intense bushfires can only be achieved by effective damage mitigation and fuels management measures undertaken right now. Relying on the impact of reducing CO2 emissions will not fix today's bushfire threat.
10. A bushfire system based only on post-fire response and recovery is cruelly expensive, whereas one based on preventions, preparedness and damage mitigation saves money (as well as lives and the environment).
11. Tasmania's bushland is not bushfire-fragile. It evolved in an environment in which fire has been present for thousands of years (read Gammage). Attempts to exclude fire by banning burning and extinguishing wildfires is akin to trying to stop the tide coming in.

Finally:

The key to effective bushfire management is good land management, i.e., investment in systematic and effective strategies to **prevent** large, high intensity bushfires.

The alternative of focusing only on responding to fires after they start will result inevitably in large, high intensity bushfires, i.e., a total failure to protect Tasmania's people, environment and resources.

Bushfire management must therefore be put in the hands of Tasmania's land managers, not in the hands of the emergency responders. Managers and responders are both needed, but the key job is that of the former, and if this job is done effectively, the job of the latter becomes easier, cheaper and safer.

Yours sincerely



Roger Underwood AM
Chairman,
April 30, 2019