

SUBMISSION TO NSW INDEPENDENT BUSHFIRE INQUIRY

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Your Story

We live at the top of the mountain at Kurrajong Heights at 600m elevation with the Wollomli National Park to the north and the Blue Mountains National Park to the west.

In 2013 we made an emergency dash home from holiday in NZ as it appeared that the whole of the Blue Mountains was going to go up in flames. We were saved by a successful backburn from Bilpin to Mountain Lagoon to our north west.

On October 26th we watched the Gaspers Mountain Fire start and stayed home until we evacuated on December 20th. The fire could not be contained by the RFS and it was a matter of waiting until it reached us. There had been no visible hazard reduction completed by National Parks in the intervening 6 years and fuel loads had grown and grown. We were living beside a time bomb.

1.1. Causes and Contributing Factors

HAZARD REDUCTION AROUND KURRAJONG HEIGHTS

- Land to the north, west and south of the top of the mountain at Kurrajong Heights had not been hazard reduced for 11 years
- Land further to the west had not been hazard reduced since 2001
- Land to the north east towards East Kurrajong has not been hazard reduced since 2001

RFS Report to the Community indicates that fuel loads greater than 6-7 years cannot be tackled by the brigade.

http://khrfs.org/files/ReportToCommunity_KH2020_Final.pdf

This document explains how the Environmental Assessment Bushfire Code and the RFS bureaucracy act to prevent hazard reduction. We have to ensure frequent hazard reduction to keep our communities safe and the Bushfire Code specified 10 years to 28 years between burns is completely incompatible with our safety. It also ensures that our bushland is choked by weeds and invasive plants rather than having plentiful fresh native grass for our animals and it guarantees very hot wild fires that destroy everything. THIS APPROACH HAS TO BE CHANGED.

HAZARD REDUCTION IN NATIONAL PARKS

Kurrajong Heights is surrounded by National Parks to the south, west and north. These parks have received little hazard reduction over the years and the actual HR according to the National Parks in 2019 is 135,000 hectares. This represents 1.9% of their land under their management. The required figure is in the 15% to 20% range per annum.

Because so little hazard reduction has taken place the fires are extremely hot, and the scale of destruction to fauna and flora has been indescribable. We walked around Mt Banks this week and there is almost no living thing left in the area. We saw two small birds and a couple of flies. Professional shooters had to be employed to kill the burnt wildlife on the Putty Rd. Heartbreaking.

Aboriginal burning would be a very good solution for our National Parks and would return them to good health and avoid any possibility for mega fire.

1.2 Preparation and Planning

TREES OVER EVACUATION ROUTE

Our only evacuation route is down Bells Line of Road. There are trees overhanging the road all down Bellbird Hill. 30% of the deaths that occurred near Marysville in Victoria in their bad fires was from people being trapped in their cars by falling trees.

FIRE TRAIL MAINTENANCE

The National Parks needs to maintain fire trails ... not plant trees on them and not put gates across them. There is also an access issue here for older people like us who want to enjoy our parks but can no longer do a 20km hike.

1.3 Response to bushfires

GREATER AUTONOMY FOR LOCAL RFS BRIGADE

RFS fire management practices need to take more account of local knowledge, and ensure local experienced crews are allocated to firegrounds close to their base where this knowledge can be applied.

1.4 Any other matters

FIRES NEAR ME APP

The app was useless. Details on the fire front were up to a day behind the actual. We have sprinklers on our roof and need to know when the fire is near so we can turn them on and evacuate. The ALERTwildfire camera system used in the USA can provide automatic fire mapping and is a useful tool for both community and fire brigades alike. I have discussed the option of commencing this service in Australia with its principal Dr Graham Kent and would be keen to see its adoption as a community based initiative. See attached file.

<http://www.alertwildfire.org/index.html>

AIRCRAFT

Why do we spend \$26 million on an aircraft you can buy for \$2 - \$3 million or less plus a hugely expensive support contract when we could simply add some water tanks in the RAAF Hercules? And why when we spend all this money on a LAT do we fail to despatch it immediately to put out the Gospers Mountain Fire?

ATACHED FILES

ALERTWildfire in Australia v2.pdf

Report to Community KH 2020 Final.pdf