

**Bush Users Group Indigo Region:**  
***Conservation AND Access***  
**Submission to C.O.A.G. Bushfire Inquiry 2003.**

The Bush Users Group Indigo Region welcomes the opportunity to have a cooperative working relationship with the State and Federal Governments on all aspects of management of public lands through our broad based membership spread throughout Victoria.

In regard to the Victorian Fire Inquiry, members of the Bush Users Group Indigo Region, were disappointed that the State Government didn't see fit to allow people from all emergency services and Government employees to give evidence. We feel this did not allow a wider view of the issues that were out on the fire front, particularly the opportunity to change the things that did not work. We feel that a great opportunity was lost to the Victorian fire mitigation and management process and to the people of Victoria.

The Federal Bushfire Inquiry: *A Nation Charred*, offered a much wider scope for members of the community, the bushfire agencies and Government workers, from all over Australia to have vital, valuable input and we applaud the Federal Government and the Select committee for the sensitive way in which they carried out the inquiry. We thank Sophie Panopolous M.P. our sitting member, for her dedicated input into the inquiry.

**Risk Factors Contributing to Bushfires:**

The biggest, most important risk factor to fires in Australia appears to be the large number of national parks and the obvious neglect in the management of them. We have now reached the stage where we have more than 4 million hectares of parks. There is a direct correlation between the growth in national park area and the drop in adequate management. The fires during the summer of 2002/2003 are evidence of this failed management. In addition, recreational and commercial opportunities are being overly restricted by biased, unfair public land management decisions.

## **1. Fuel Reduction Burns:**

Fuel reduction burns in a mosaical manner need to be carried out with input from fire specialists and should be in conjunction with the D.S.E. who need to communicate and work in an amicable manner with the C.F.A. and local fire savvy people and communities.

### **1a. Fuel Reduction by Grazing:**

In grazed grasslands of the Bogong Alpine National Park the fire went out, thus creating areas in which entire eco-systems of plants, animals, birds, and insects could find refuge. In areas where cattle have been excluded, eg. Mt. Nelse, the whole area was burnt leaving no refuge for anything.

Moss beds, which were grazed around and sometimes through, are the only ones that survived. Moss beds in ungrazed areas, that had a thick heath build up around them were completely burnt. A good example of this is Mazies plot, fenced in 1946 and which was an extremely hot burn. (*Information courtesy Mr. Alan Mull, Mount Beauty*) There is a huge amount of photographic evidence to prove this point.

## **2. Buffer Zones around Private Land:**

a vitally important issue we feel, is that a buffer zone be recommended around the boundaries of the private land holder on the side of the national or state parks. The zone should not be less than 40 or 50 metres. This would allow the property owner the opportunity to impede the fires progress, with the use of bulldozers, etc. and allow fire trucks cleared access to the fires, which invariably come out of national or state parks and maybe the chance to save valuable fencing and other valuable assets, eg. pasture, stock, machinery, shedding, and farm stock. It would also save the impact of trees falling on fence lines, allowing domestic stock to enter national parks.

### **3. Track and Trail Closures**

in the hundreds of submissions to the Federal inquiry, the number of track closures is alarming. It is our urgent recommendation that tracks remain open and be maintained. Each time a fire event comes along, vital time is wasted re-opening tracks and before the disaster has passed they are re-closed. This is a monumental waste of resources.

The washing of bulldozers in the middle of the worst catastrophe this country has seen is a futile action and is absolutely obscene in the face of the whole disaster, and is a waste of precious water.

### **4. Feral Weeds and Animals**

Feral weeds and animals need to be dealt with immediately post fires. It is important that the necessary funds are made available.

### **5. Accessibility to Water**

We recommend that an assessment be made of all small towns in regard to the availability of accessible water reserves in the immediate vicinity. A particular situation arose in our vicinity during the recent 2002 / 2003 bushfires, at the small township of Stanley. No reticulated water, or stored volume of any description was available. The C.F.A. had to rely upon a temporary dam placed on a small creek to hopefully achieve these requirements. This is a perfect example of where, if a large dam were provided in the immediate vicinity of town, this would be beneficial for use, not only by ground fire fighting groups, but the use of the helicopters, in asset protection.

**Win Morgan**  
**President**