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Council of Australian Governments
Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management
Secretariat
Prime Minister and Cabinet
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

INQUIRY on BUSHFIRE MITIGATION and MANAGEMENT

COAG and the Prime Minister are to be congratulated for their initiative to find solutions and management of bush fires, the preservation of life, property, and sustainable bush flora and fauna environment. I do however believe that there are issues not in the PM's brief that impact most severely on current expected outcomes.

My brief profile attached will illustrate my involvement in global sustainable environment and various government environmental inquiries. Having chaired or given papers at many sustainable environmental conferences both here and overseas I relate such to a suburban homeowner.

The homeowner to maintain a sustainable asset is responsible for,
Internal cleanliness,
Windows clear and unbroken,
Paintwork without blemish,
The sewerage-drainage and water system without leaks or roots of vegetation strangling them,
Pest infestation control, and
The lawns and gardens in harmony with the environs
One asset administrator for the total environs and environment!

When it comes to administration of our principal home environment and environs Australia we have, firstly, the Cabinet sustainable environment (development) committee, followed by the States and regional administrations. Breaking this down into an array of power-based administrations the household should be alarmed because of the conflicting decisions and outcomes. For example, currently at federal and State levels there are inquiries into,

Water use,
Riparian water,
Blue green algae,
Salinity,
Drought,
Climate change,
Weeds-noxious plants,
Pest infestation and now the
Bushfire inquiry.

Alas there is no inquiry into

The water starving of the aquifers and ground water flow that previously maintained a healthy green, fire and drought retardant vegetation and supply for food irrigation, or

Redirecting water from the Ord River to recharge eastern and southern aquifers town and city dams.

There is no inquiry into the true cost / replacement cost of consumption of commodities raw materials (environmental economics) nor

Ethanol taking soil carbon rich vegetation from plantations to cook into ethanol emitting more CO₂ than saved,

Urban expansion v decentralization nor

Bio fuel grants when the emissions also exceed claimed emission reductions nor

The PM's sole rejection of the Kyoto protocol that means that, the commodities (including his recent announcement of LNG/LPG) all will carry heavy embargoes' once the Protocol is ratified. Had we ratified Kyoto we would have received the funds (via an emission trading via an eminent persons perpetual trust) to fund national water, land and vegetation reparation. Having toured the worlds degraded lands we are heading for environmental third world status.

Poor uncorrected environmental administration errors compound and, the compounded issues address the symptom not the cause.

So, the household has dozens of administrators, all doing differing jobs but, in the implementing the decisions in one area of administration it will mean a high detrimental and likely irreversible degradation elsewhere.

Some examples

Historical records show that, governments gave bonuses for total land clearing and planting out of non-drought tolerant grasses for grazing, clearing of evaporation controlling algae consuming reeds from watercourses and billabongs. This is where that committee decision resulted in the cancerous decision that has led to the demise of the total asset left for this our generation to restore for the next generation.

▫ The run-off water unabated (no water sequestering vegetation) flowed quicker creating the streams and rivers system of today (there was no River system with big fat gum trees growing in the midst of the flow, the flow cut the gullies). The billabongs and aquifers no longer recharged and the cleared land now saline.

▫ With no C3 transpiring trees or worse drought tolerant, fire retardant, salt tolerant C4 vegetation, rainfall patterns changes retarding rainfall into the interior catchments.

▫ Drought frequencies increased and existing trees died or were cut down by desperate landholder for short-term fodder (with long term consequences). Desperate landholders continue to cut for short-term fodder.

Without the known halophytic, drought tolerant fodder quality vegetation, the deep gullies now forming rivers at levels below of prior water course flows and entry points of aquifers that decision created

- (a) Farmers who are now dependant' upon the generosity of city folk, robbing them of self-reliance. Feed a farmer today you will feed him again at the next crisis, fix the problem he feeds the world.
- (b) He must, to starve off the Banks, flogs his soil of carbon (lifeblood) by growing C3 crops in the hope that sustainable rains will come
- (c) He has to undertake (government) weed infestation removal on his drought declared property at his cost
- (d) The State and federal government is claiming all rights to the God delivered rain water in his dams and
- (e) His aquifer water share' is being claimed by government even though, the Constitution, Magna Carta, international law, state clearly "land and water are inseparable and not government owned"!
- (f) The Federal Cabinet has accepted incorrect advice to buy water rights from any farmer (including those above aquifers) or unused riparian water rights or sleepers and dozers in the belief that,
- (g) the paper figures are fact, that 6 Sydney Harbours of water, "like a Gift from God" will appear, flush out the European Man Made 19th century Murray Darling river system of the other man made toxic algae but once.

(h) The land above the aquifers is sinking due to the drying out of the former water recharge areas. The houses, roads, sheds, have cracks as has the soil where farmer sold off their water rights.

So the decision of the homeowner above to stop irrigating his garden will in due course wonder why the walls are cracking, the window cracked, the sewerage pipe clogged up, and the water supply pipe ruptured. The next owner discovers the big trees seeking new water source found a reservoir under the house and foundations. One environmental decision in isolation had an adverse impact upon the asset elsewhere.

My personal record of contribution and detailed research to various Senate, government, salinity, water, local and global emission trading inquiries conclude in relevant sections my comments as the recommendation. Indeed there has been extended interest from the Prime Minister in our range of low cost “seed direct to soil” planting of C4 halophytic (1) drought-proofing CO2 sequestering vegetation. At low cost, if not no cost, Australia can be drought-proofed, fire retardant and salt reversed nation, but, alas, it requires, vision, political will, real decisions, against a backdrop of ill informed but media popular advisors whom see a perceived risk rather a hard work but verifiable solution. History, as it is so often said, “forget it and you are doomed to repeat it”. We are living the fact of ignorance!

Scientific papers from global universities, academies, and early European explorers (2) journals of travels into the interior of the Australian landscape detail information of vegetation to droughts floods and bushfires proof the (our) assets.

Governments hold enquiries, set up CRC's to figure out what our records already store.

The world's best research scientist and 120 nations confirm that man ignored history and science and now the world' is inflicted by human induced Climate Change. 14 USA States 150 mayors of major cities and major industries are suing the President and his EPA for not ratifying Kyoto. Australia stands alone basically in rejecting 120 world leaders and their scientists by not ratifying Kyoto.

Contrary to Leading Early European Explorers and Charles Darwin's advice we cleared vegetation and reed barriers that controlled water flowing down and across catchments bring nutrient to the soil and recharging aquifers. This single decision allowing water to cut new deep gully routes we now call rivers. People stand in wonder today and ask, “How did that grand gum ever grow in the middle of that river”? There are 2 answers.

We ignore early historical written and visual records that note how salinity was across the very irrigation regions of today's and how the developing engineers altered the maps supporting funding by removal of all references to salt creek, salt plains, salt marshes, saltbush plain. The river system of today cut directly through such regions hence water in riparian flows will in this land remain saline.

The river system today follows a different course to that of 1860's and even 1930's. Life sustaining aquifers are no longer charged with water as most see the new river and believe it to be the only water delivery means. The larger irrigated food production regions above aquifers are dying for lack of historical recharge water.

Salinity was not a problem for early settlers and squatters. Most recognized that halophytic vegetation grew in forest like conditions soaking up and lower water regions from reaching salt soils below the surface. **They made another major discovery that these halophytic forests and bushes were fire retardant. They planted them around homesteads, sheds and towns. There was no order or beautification selection, just, simple life and property preservation. When brush fires appeared on the horizon graziers drove livestock into paddocks surrounded by halophytic fire retardant vegetation.**

The historical data details how native animals and aborigines sheltered in native fire retardant vegetation. When the aborigines lit their wild indiscriminant fires to capture a feed of native animals running from the flames they sheltered in such vegetation when the fire went out of control. **Steel will burn but assembled native C4 halophytic vegetation that once covered Australia particularly in concert with C3 forestry needs a dedicated effort to support burning. In those prior times other sustaining elements were still in place (ground water transpiring rainfall).**

Landholders who purchased holdings from the original owners saw these large areas of vegetation surrounding their homes, sheds, paddocks as unnecessary and removed them to let the rolling grass plains, bush and high oil content mallee and eucalyptus right up to the homestead. The next and next owners knew nothing of halophytic fire retardant vegetation or a combination of such would save life and assets. I note the media and others today listen to oral concepts from “environmental groups” of what should be done to repair the environment but not backed by hard historical scientific proven data or comprehensive model.

So with the clearing of the watercourses of halophytic vegetation and reeds, and mass removal of fire retardant vegetation, changing of ground water flows, has created a land of perpetual flood, fire, salt, and drought that governments accept as fact.

Suburban roads, rail, streets, paved areas and homes direct water into drainage systems kilometers from where it fell. This water once recharged ground water that fed healthy green trees, under growth, and fire retardant C4 vegetation. For beautification and access to surrounding forests government agencies clear the undergrowth of C4 high moisture content vegetation adding dry air/oxygen to the flames in the oil rich trees. The fire trails cut historical water flows and therefore retard healthy water content vegetation growth.

History also confirms, that, today politicians run the nation and instruct the voters. Repeatedly new administrations call for inquiries to confirm something is happening, nothing ever does except history repeats itself. Hopefully from the public at large particularly the elder rural citizen (who is forced to live the poor decisions of the past), your members can collect data of what must be changed in one environmental solution will be homogenous and certainly not detrimental to another.

I respectfully suggest the eleventh hour of establishing a home management total business plan is needed homogenizing all aspects of asset management.

If the inquiry is interested documentation of published historical reports of fire management I can table and arrange a demonstration of halophytic, fire retardant vegetation and technology, to be undertaken subject to agreement timing and possible cost being established.

I wish the inquiry much success.

I am without prejudice

Robert Vincin
25/10/03

- (1) Vincin R Condon R AOM (former western land commissioner nsw) The Missing Sink circulated early 2000 to member nations UNFCCC to vote upon including Australian C4 halophytic vegetation into Kyoto protocol article 3.3 and 3.4. Halophytic vegetation and forestry are high water retention varieties.
- (2) Vincin R et al What if there was no river system Murray Darling workshop 1996 The second stream management conference 1999. Extensive historical records of landholders fire retarding their assets with C4 vegetation is available

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