



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Greg

Last name

McTaggart

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A primary producer

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Consent to make submission public

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I am a 5th generation Australian primary producer whose original ancestors settled in the Howes Valley area. A lot of the grazing country we have been associated with has been medium to narrow valleys and ridges in mountainous terrain. Usually the valleys and gullies where the water is were portions held as freehold and the surrounding mountain sides and ridges were crown land held as leases. I remain a holder of this type of enterprise, though much of the leased land has been taken from me and now under the management of either the National Parks or Forestry. This is what has happened with numerous landholders since the 1970's in my area, with much of the land now making up the Wollemi and Yango National Parks and Pokolobin State Forest. Although Forests NSW continued to manage their land in a successful traditional manner for some years it wasn't long before they lost their option/approval/ability to regularly burn their country and adopted the scandalous management practises of NPWS. In reality, the issue here is

more the lack of management by neglecting to carry out SUCCESSFUL regular burning.

I am 68 years old and never do I recall “wild fires” on any of our land or that managed by traditional bushmen prior to our new neighbours (National Parks & State Forests) arriving. Burning was a natural and necessary part of managing this land. Not only to rid it of fuel on the ground and an understory of undesired scrub, but to promote growth of natural pasture. In all, this type of active plant growth would have to create a greater “carbon sink” than neglecting to burn properly and letting growth of rubbish in the understory. Although the country was grazed by cattle it was only lightly grazed and only throughout the winter months. This weather protected “back country” was a necessary part of a grazing management plan that provided warmth and natural fodder to carry breeders and fatten steers over winter when feed on the flats was reduced by cold weather or destroyed by frosts.

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

In short, the LACK OF PROPER MANAGEMENT of land such as that associated with Wollemi & Yango National Park and Pokolbin State Forest, is the greatest contributing factor to the wild fires we experienced in the spring and summer of 2019/20. It is the same reason for other extreme fires we have experienced at regular intervals since the custody of the land has shifted from graziers to government bodies. By management, I specifically mean burning of the land to get rid of undesirable scrub type species in the understory and promote natural pasture growth and to maintain sustainability of the main tree types. This was a management practise used so successfully in previous years by graziers and also by State Forests

Some might say if we didn't have arsonists, human error or lightening strikes we wouldn't have such extreme fires. But the facts are we will always have all these causes hence we will always have fires. So what we have to look at is what we can do to minimise the extent and ferocity of the fires once they have started. Good management practise should look at ways of curing the cause of any problem in preference to the effects. Above, I have established the cause is the lack of successfully eliminating undesired growth in the understory. This is the cause we have to cure. The effects in this case are secondary and should be considered under the heading of Response to Bushfires.

1.2 Preparation and planning

I was not surprised when officers from NPWS told me the 2019/20 fires “even went straight through the areas where they had conducted hazard reduction in the previous autumn”. From the “prescribed burns” I have seen carried out by NPWS you could say they only got those sections to burn where they poured petrol on. For a start, you can't pick a day two years in advance and say that is the day of the burn. Whilst the notification to adjoining owners is appreciated, a shorter lead time with some flexibility on days around the proposed time of lightings should be applied. This would help ensure it is not going to be lit on a day that it is raining. For an appropriate burn you need it to be dry with some heat and some breeze and that is at least the top end their current restrictions on temperature and wind speed.

But most importantly, the time to burn in this area for safety reasons is very late winter to early spring. It was never the practise of the “old timers” to burn in autumn. First, most of our

rain falls in late summer to early autumn, so you are trying to burn the flush of green growth that has resulted from the good rains and warm weather. Second they didn't burn in autumn because it would mean they would burn the feed they relied on for winter. In actual fact it was common when all the land was in private hands up until the 1970's to burn in conjunction with neighbours, any time up to Christmas without any cause of alarm. The fires would burn into each other and go out or they would burn into areas that had been burnt earlier and go out. National Parks and Forests NSW should therefore seriously consider changing the timing of there hazard reduction burns to late winter/early spring.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Nobody should ever be asked to fight bushfires in National Parks or State Forests where no human life is at risk. Nor should money be wasted water bombing bushfires from helicopters or airplanes in parks and forests if human life or property is not at risk.

In many cases fauna is safe around the area of the bushfire, yet platypuses, turtles, fish etc are being scooped up in the water by aircraft and dropped on the fire to be fried.

Back burning should be used more often as a means of fire control especially in the evening and under favourable weather conditions.

The best time to fight fires in daylight hours is early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

It is very difficult to stop a wild fire under hot and windy conditions in the middle of the day or even attempt to do so. The RFS, NPWS should review their hours of control to ensure they are there at the most appropriate times and not just driving around wasting time or money on unnecessary motor vehicle running and damage costs.

The volunteer RFS is a great system and should remain a volunteer brigade. They have proved to be very successful organisation and it works well.

1.4 Any other matters

As I have pointed out above, regular and proper burning of the type of country around Wollemi National Parks is an essential part of land and cattle grazing management on the adjoining privately owned properties. Not only is it important to prevent major bushfires, it is also important to keep the land clean for winter feed and shelter and for the control of certain weeds and pests like the non plague type grasshoppers. NPWS have made it impossible to burn privately owned adjoining and in-holdings for fear it goes wild if it get on the park land. The wild fires caused by the mismanagement of the park result in a lot of damage and loss. One problem of red hot fires burning country at the wrong time of the year is the introduction of an influx of suckers that are so thick they kill all other species and in a short time you can't ride a horse through them. Whilst on the other hand, wild fires have been known to eliminate some species of trees. One example in my time has been the loss of Cyprus pines.

Though NPWS cooperate as a good neighbour with some things like feral pest control, they leave a lot to be desired when it comes to bushfires hazard reduction.

I would like to see this inquiry look at the need fo NPWS to provide greater assistance to adjoining property owners when they need to carry out controlled burning as a necessary practise for good land management.

Supporting documents or images
