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I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>The Far South Coast Fires in Review</p> <p>On New Year's Eve, I woke early to the sound of television reports on the building fire risk. My wife, was worried about the worsening fire reports and the location of our residence in [REDACTED], in the middle of a eucalyptus forest.</p> <p>At 9 AM our electricity supply failed. By 1 PM we had no internet or mobile phone service. By 3PM our land line went down. We then turned to local radio for fire reports from the ever-reliable ABC South East. The station was nowhere to be found. A local commercial radio station did it's best to disseminate useful information, but referred us to information available on an internet that had failed hours earlier. A neighbour drove to the Dalmeny Fire station, only to learn that our valiant fire fighters were as ill-informed as the Dalmeny public on the status of the local fire</p>

front.

Council planners have referred to our subdivision as a fine example of environmental living. I have always viewed it as “a bushfire waiting to happen”, and had the wind not changed direction on 31st December 2019, I have no doubt that we would be another casualty of the South Coast bushfires.

We are aged in our seventies and retirement is not the time in life to be faced with physical trauma of bushfire, and the risk of losing everything. But this is exactly what our coastal planners are offering retirees in these eco-friendly subdivisions, created by legislators who hail from inner-city safe havens, and implemented by council planners who have no idea of the Australian bush.

As a boy, I lived in a family of volunteer country firefighters. The older kids mopped up with wet hessian bags after the firemen doused the flames or set the back burns. Private farms and bushland were maintained in a fire safe manner that made it easier for fire fighters to set up and service containment lines. Fuel loads were removed from State Forests as they were thinned or logged, and those National Parks that existed at that time, were serviced by properly maintained fire trails and run by well-trained forestry workers.

My grand-father’s greatest fear was poor forest maintenance and the “crowning”, “fire balls” and other erratic behaviour associated with high intensity bush fires. Fortunately, he experienced very few high intensity fires in his fifty years of firefighting, in the first half of the last century.

What has changed in the last sixty years to create a situation where half of the country can burn at the same time and communications fail in one of the world’s most technologically advanced societies? How can we lose huge native animal populations in one fell swoop, when “green” legislation has been enacted by all of our states and territories to protect both our native flora and fauna? Someone has gotten it very wrong.

There is no question that the world is currently going through a warming phase, and climate change, anthropogenic or not, may have contributed to the dryer conditions that are conducive to the current bushfire conditions. No-one however, with any serious knowledge and understanding of bushfires and the Australian bush, would brand climate change the major cause of the current dilemma. Fires require fuel, and the intensity of the fire is directly related to the fuel load supporting that fire. Add a strong and hot inland wind and towns and suburbs that extend into protected forest habitats, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Green activists have been influencing Australia’s environmental policies since the early nineteen seventies. They have pushed their brand of environmental protection and promoted Agenda 21 (now Agenda 2030) that was endorsed by Australia at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Devised as a plan for world sustainability, Agenda 21 promoted the locking up of forests as carbon sinks and oxygen producers and protectors of bio-diversity and animal habitat. The problem, Australian delegates should have recognised, was that “locked up” eucalypt forests do not behave like Amazon rain forests or the temperate deciduous forests of the Northern Hemisphere.

Instead of creating a green wonderland for the future protection of Australia and the human race, the United Nations and well-meaning legislators created an environmental time-bomb that exploded this summer.

Many fires started in our maze of National Parks that are now

inaccessible through a lack of fire trail maintenance. This inaccessibility means that the fires cannot be extinguished at the source, and grow into large infernos fuelled by over 20 years of accumulated combustible materials. Control burning has been reduced or eliminated and allowed fuel loads to build up to levels that would have horrified our early farmers and aboriginal elders.

The story is similar in our State Forests where foresters are not permitted to clean up the forest floor after thinning and logging. Instead the debris is left to accommodate our fauna that has now been wiped out by the high intensity bush fires that this type of legislated mismanagement has created.

To add to the problem, our planning gurus have legislated the development of eco-friendly residential subdivisions that extend into poorly managed eucalyptus forests, along with houses approved for bush locations that have totally inadequate asset protection zones.

And that is not all!

In NSW Environmental E-Zones have been created to lock up vast tracts of environmentally sensitive lands, both public and private, with the aim of returning these lands to their pre-European settlement condition. "Bio-diversity Certification" has also been introduced to offset land cleared for development purposes. A developer who cannot produce the necessary credits, is required to purchase and lock up in perpetuity, similar land, that is many times the size of the original development.

The legislation applying to both of these "green" initiatives is contributing to an accumulation of "locked up" forest land that will not be properly maintained by local authorities. The unmanaged fuel problem will only add to the wild fire problem in years to come.

I am now sitting on the same deck where I sat on New Year's Eve waiting for the fire storm to arrive. By good fortune it survived, and we dodged the bullet that caused loss of life, and destroyed many homes in our Far South Coast communities. But it is now a question of when, rather than if, that deck, and the house attached to it, will be consumed by the "red steer".

Ian Hitchcock
Dalmeny

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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