

Submission to NSW Bushfire Inquiry

Submitted by:

Name PETER TRAHAR
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Submission Summary

The fires surrounding Sydney and in wider NSW, in 2019-2020, show that current policies and resources are not good enough.

At present most firefighting activity is reactive and there is no consensus on the balance between preventive action and protection of habitat and species. Authority for land management and emergency response is spread across many organisations.

Consensus between all parties is needed as to preventive and reactive procedures, equipment, manpower and funding. To achieve this State Government should convene a 'commission' including all interested parties.

The 'commission' should be made up of:

- Steering group with authority to influence government
- Working group to:
 - receive written submissions from interested parties
 - conduct work-shops to develop consensus or at least majority position on each issue.
 - be given sufficient time to achieve results
 - meet regularly with the Steering group to build government support.

My perspective as an affected landholder who watched the Gospers Mountain fire grow from 14 ha to >500,000 ha leads me propose the following:

1. **Enable rapid response to small fires**, particularly in difficult terrain:
 - a. Resource National Parks to maintain fire trails and control public access to them.
 - b. Empower RFS to specify:
 - i. National Park fire trail location and construction
 - ii. Remote Area Fire Fighter drop off and pick up locationsin consultation with National Parks to minimize erosion and impact on flora and fauna – BUT with RFS having the final say.
 - c. Provide a larger and more flexible fleet of NSW owned water bombing aircraft:

- i. RAAF to specify the aircraft to best fit with their current fleet
 - ii. Specify short take-off capacity to increase available basing sites
 - iii. Specify night flying and heat detection capacity
 - iv. Specify radio systems to communicate with RFS and F&R vehicles and personnel and 'bucket helicopters'
 - v. RAAF to man and maintain the fleet
 - vi. RFS to specify the tasking of the fleet
 - vii. Sufficient aircraft to be included in the fleet to:
 - 1. Cover multiple bases within NSW
 - 2. Provide the ability to have follow up 'bombing' to seriously knock down small fires in difficult terrain
 - 3. Deliver Remote Area Fire-fighters to and retrieve them from difficult terrain
 - d. Give RFS control of firefighting in National Parks
2. **Simplify the process for authorizing hazard reductions:**
 - a. Reduce the lead time
 - b. Involve advocates of 'cool burning' and 'cultural' burning
 - c. Empower the RFS to conduct hazard reductions on private land – on the request of the land owner.
 3. **Identify the RFS personnel with deep knowledge of fire-fighting** techniques and establish programmes to train lesser skilled volunteers.
 4. **RFS to specify the tasking** of Fire and Rescue in rural and peri-urban locations
 5. **Commonwealth to assist NSW** with funding
 6. **NSW to enact legislation** to establish needed authority.

Submission Detail

The issues raised above are set out in more detail in the following.

1. Achieving needed consensus
2. My Declaration of Interest and Recommended Action
3. Impact on 25 Powells Road Bilpin NSW 2758 of the escaped Mt Wilson back burn on 21 December 2019
4. Peter Trahar's CV

1. Achieving needed consensus

Submitted by:

Peter Trahar, Woodgreen Angus Stud, 25 Powells Road Bilpin NSW 2758

The fires surrounding Sydney and in wider NSW, in December 2019, show that current policies and resources are not good enough.

We need improvement not blame allocation.

The Australian Constitution gives the Commonwealth defined powers and leaves the rest to the States.

Improvements in policy and resources need to be driven by NSW with Commonwealth support.

At present:

- most firefighting activity is reactive and
- there is no consensus on:
 - the balance between:
 - preventive action:
 - back burns
 - cool burns
 - fire trail maintenance
 - clearance between dwellings and trees and shrubs.
 - ...
 - protection of:
 - Habitat
 - Threatened plant species
 - National parks
 - Tree preservation orders
 - ...
 - Allocation of authority
 - National Parks and Wildlife
 - Forestry Corporation
 - Australian Defence
 - Rural Fire Service
 - Fire and Rescue
 - State Emergency Services
 - Local Councils
 - Individual land holders
 - ...

Results such as the >500,000 hectare Gospers Mountain fireground are not what we want.

Continued ...

To better protect people, property, wildlife and the environment attention must be given to gaining agreement, as to:

- preventive and reactive procedures,
- equipment,
- manpower and
- funding,

between:

- State Government and Opposition
- Rural Fire Service
- Fire and Rescue
- National Parks and Wildlife
- Forestry Corporation
- State Emergency Services
- Australian Defence
- Advocates of 'cool burns' and 'cultural burns'
- Local Councils
- Individual Landholders
- Landcare
- ...

State Government should convene a 'commission' including **all interested parties** with an agenda:

1. Declaration of **Interests**
2. Declaration of organisation's **objectives**
3. Declaration of **activities** and **resources** involved in the 2019-2020 fires
4. Identification of **key issues**
5. Proposed **improvements**:
 - a. Actions
 - b. Procedures
 - c. Resources
 - d. Funds
 - e. Legislation
 - f. ...

The 'commission' should be made up of:

- Steering group with authority to influence government
- Working group to:
 - receive written submissions from interested parties – setting out items 1 to 5 above
 - conduct work-shops to develop consensus or at least majority position on each of 5a to f above.
 - be given sufficient time to achieve results
 - meet regularly with the Steering group to build government support.

2. My Declaration of interest and Recommended Action

Submitted by:

Peter Trahar, Woodgreen Angus Stud, [REDACTED]

Interest

Our control of activities on our land

Objectives

Protection of our land, family and business

Activities and Resources during the August to December 2019 fires.

Cattle breeding and Grazing

- Rotational grazing and weed slashing to maximise pasture use
- As fires approached shortened grass in vulnerable areas
- Fire pump; 50mm flat fire hoses; 100,000 litre water tank for fire-fighting; large dams and open paddocks
- The fire that attacked us on 21 December 2019 originated from the escaped back burn at Mt Wilson. A combination of constant helicopter bucketing and sporadic bombing with fire retardant by the 3 large air tankers tried for days to control the fire south of the Bells Line of Road at the west end of Bilpin. To no avail as a strong southerly change carried the fire north and then west up creeks on our property. Fire approached the base of a pine line that threatened our house. A Cat 1 arrived but would not enter the paddock to go to the fire. As the fire got closer to the pine line, we called 000. Two Cat 1's arrived, assessed the situation, decided the house was undefendable if the fire reached the top of the pine line. The Captain called in a strike team, used a combination of a wet line and back burn to stop the fire climbing the pine line and saved the house and probably neighbours on the other side of dense vegetation.

Key Issues

- Letting fires grow from ~14 ha to ~500,00 ha through Inadequate maintenance of fire trails in National Parks and lack of National Park fire-fighting resources
- Patchy air support with limited capacity
- Excessive fuel loads through bureaucratic restrictions on the RFS' ability to hazard reduce
- Tree preservation orders restricting removal of highly flammable natives close to structures
- Variable skills within the RFS

Proposed Improvements

Background

2019 demonstrated the problems posed by drought and hot weather. It showed the high cost of retrieving the situation when there is little preventive action. *(An ounce of prevention is worth more than a ton of cure)*. Years of fuel accumulation in National Parks, long drought and hot weather produced massive damage to parks, flora and fauna and choked large parts of the state with hazardous smoke. And then outside the Parks individual property owners and occupiers lost property, livelihood and lives.

Proposed:

1. **Enable rapid response to small fires**, particularly in difficult terrain:
 - a. Resource National Parks to maintain fire trails and control public access to them.
 - b. Empower RFS to specify:
 - i. National Park fire trail location and construction
 - ii. Remote Area Fire Fighter drop off and pick up locations in consultation with National Parks to minimize erosion and impact on flora and fauna – BUT with RFS having the final say.
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 - c. Empower the RFS to conduct hazard reductions on private land – on the request of the land owner.
3. **Identify the RFS personnel with deep knowledge of fire-fighting** techniques and establish programmes to train lesser skilled volunteers.
4. **RFS to specify the tasking** of Fire and Rescue in rural and peri-urban locations
5. **Commonwealth to assist NSW** with funding
6. **NSW to enact legislation** to establish needed authority.

3. Impact on [REDACTED] on 21 Dec 2019 of the escaped Mt Wilson back burn

Submitted by:

Peter Trahar, Woodgreen Angus Stud, [REDACTED]

Fires had been around northwest of us for weeks. They then went south and east of us.

On 21 Dec at about 6-7 pm a strong southerly blew through and carried the southerly fire across our southern creek and into the northern creek. The wind shifted south easterly and blew the fire up the creeks. At the western end of the southern creek, as the wind abated, the fire was threatening to creep up hill along a pine line at the top of which was the south side of our house.

Our cars and machines were in a big paddock with short grass. That was our evacuation point. It worked and was untouched. Except for some smouldering cow pats.

The captain of the third Cat 1 fire truck assessed the house was undefendable because of the proximity of the pines to the south and the dense undergrowth under them on the neighbouring property.

They then did a 'wet line' for about 20 feet and a back burn of about 50 feet and stopped the fire in its tracks.

Conclusions.

1. We did not expect attack from the south. We believed strong south winds were coastal. Long time Bilpin residents did not expect attack from the south. We now need to prepare for attack from any direction.
2. Our mid-paddock vehicle park and evacuation area was safe.
3. The tractor tank pump and spray worked well in mopping up
4. We were lucky:
 - The attack came in the evening on a cool wind
 - The third Cat 1 captain knew what to do and was willing to do it. He marshaled a strike team of 5 Cat 1's to bolster the 2 he already had. He could work from both north and south of the creek from cleared short grass paddocks.
5. Short grass particularly if it's green stops the fire if breeze is cool.
6. Those southern pines are going to go.
7. Reduce vegetation south of the house.
8. Keep cattle closer to house paddocks away from creek vegetation.
9. Continue to keep a store of hay.
10. Evacuate the dog early
11. Clear signage on gates: Street number, Cat 1 access, clear paddocks, Large dam
12. Keep together or know where all are
13. Don't be shy about ringing 000
14. Keep keys and wallets on person at all times
15. Pack car early with documents, valuables and enough clothes.
16. Maintain vigilance and mopping up of burnt areas for days after

4. Peter Trahar's CV

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|----------------|---|--|
| Name | PETER TRAHAR | |
| Address | [REDACTED] | |
| Occupation | PARTNER 'WOODGREEN ANGUS STUD' DIRECTOR (elected) GREATER SYDNEY LOCAL LAND SERVICES | |
| Phone number | [REDACTED] | |
| Email address | [REDACTED] | |
| Date of Birth | [REDACTED] | |
| Qualifications | BSc Sydney University 1965 Graduate Diploma of Industrial Engineering UNSW 1968 Master of Business Administration UNSW 1972 | |
| Employment | 1965-1966 | Australian Consolidated Industries – Chemist |
| | 1966-1969 | ACI Plastics – Quality Control Officer |
| | 1970-1977 | PA Management Consultants - Consultant and Senior Consultant |
| | 1972-Current | Married Peta Trahar nee Williams |
| | 1977-1985 | Turner, Breit & Trahar Management Consultants – Partner |
| | 1985-2005 | Turner, Breit & Trahar Management Consultants – Principal Clients were major companies throughout Australia and in Africa, US and UK. |
| | !988–Current | Woodgreen Angus Stud – Partner Angus Society of Australia – Full Member |
| | 2005-2015 | Collectors' Plant Fair – Partner |
| | 2007-2016 | Angus Society of Australia – Elected Director Lead the Board's development and membership acceptance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Society's new Constitution• Angus Sire Benchmarking Project |
| | 2008-2016 | Certified Angus Group – Director |
| | 2011-2016 | Certified Angus Group – Chairman Supported management as processors developed their own brands |
| | 2014-2020 | Greater Sydney Local Land Services – Elected Director Lead the Board's development and management acceptance of greater resource utilization and focus on deliverables to stakeholders |