

# SUBMISSION TO THE BUSH FIRE ENQUIRY

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## **Global conditions**

Should people in authority be concerned about climate conditions? Should we be looking at the changes or to consider business as usual?

Was the footballer that made comments concerning our predicament right in saying it was all punishment from God or was it all our own doing? You know, droughts, lack of water, no rain, bush fires from increased temperatures and dryness, hail, early summer and all that? Are we contributing to the situation and making profit from it all? It appears so.

Since The Geophysical Year of 1950,

- Around 100 glaciers have disappeared.
- The ocean has risen around 20 centimetres threatening low-lying islands and places like Bangladesh.
- Baffin Island is completely ice and snow free this last summer and farming is now done in Greenland. The North-West Passage is now ice-free in summer.
- The 2 degree Celsius protective ocean barrier around Antarctica is gone allowing warmer water to erode the ice shelves.
- Ocean temperature rising another degree will begin releasing all that CO2 stored over the last 200 years back into the atmosphere.
- Coral bleaching is on the increase.
- That one degree rise will also begin to release the stored methane in 20 million square kilometres of permafrost up north from rotting material – which is 20 times more powerful as a greenhouse gas.
- Lake Chad in Africa was 200 kilometres across and now 20. The Aral Sea doesn't exist anymore.
- The world burns around 27 cubic kilometres of coal each year.
- It took 70 years to use the first cubic mile of oil (around 4 cubic kilometres), which included the first and second World Wars. The world uses twice that each year now!

Considering that Australia is the third largest exporter of coal, or 600 million tonnes, does this mean we are profiting by global warming?

## **Terminology**

The term "Sceptic" is misused. Scientists are sceptics. A sceptic analyses and evaluates whether something is fact or not. Those who do not agree or believe something is not a fact should be called unbelievers. To this end, I would rather believe scientists and their copious research than the rhetoric of politicians and commercial interests.

## **We as a country were completely unprepared for these recent fire events.**

Have any lessons been learned and what are we doing wrong? Some observations.

1. Why was there so much fuel available for the continuation and intensity of these infernos? Land under native control has not had these infernos. Not related so much to "topping fires," leaf litter can make ground fires in forests keep alight and encourage fires to go higher in the canopy as well as providing embers to advance in windy periods.
2. With the known reduction of rainfall and hence soil moisture this and the previous year, why were preparations not made for the possible fire events which would happen?
3. Why were there no plans to consider a fleet of fire fighting aircraft? (A free fleet was available due to the C130 Hercules made surplus by retirement from the Air Force but overlooked. These were sold or given away to overseas countries following a refit.)

4. The hiring and purchase of purpose build fire fighting aircraft is a great expense. Should the ability of obtaining a fleet earlier in preparation for these and future disasters been foreseen and enacted upon?
5. We have occasionally run out of fire retardant due to unforeseen demands. Do we need to set up our own production plant here to be able to provide our requirements instead of needing to import "as needed"? With such an important need for fire control in our fragile climate, why are we dependant on supply from the US?
6. We have the ability to control some aspects of bush fires such as grass and spot fires from the ground, some ability to use water bombing and fire retardant, back burning under suitable wind changes, but we do not know how to extinguish or even some form of control over these enormous wind driven infernos.
7. Are we able to enact communities as a whole to prepare and prevent such disastrous fires in our changing world?
8. Can all levels of government get together and provide better support for those that have lost home and livelihood and mental health support as well? Many are left to their own devices, which are slim indeed.
9. What level of research is needed to be able to develop techniques to enable control these infernos?
10. Restoration of utilities appears to be slow, especially communication.
11. Some councils are asking money from those that are reconstructing their houses. Shouldn't they be donating to help these people in need as well?
12. When will a National Disaster be declared? Should it have been enacted earlier during the recent events?
13. The loss of habitat and incineration of wildlife has probably pushed many species to extinction. Our record in this area is not good.

### **Lost opportunities**

Many times governments have been misdirected or misinformed. Some authorities and professionals have been attempting to influence Governments to be prepared for future worsening events. The increasing events of previous years, to me, the opportunity outlined below was a sensible direction to go.

- From around 2013, I e-mailed the Prime Minister a number of times concerning the use of the C130 Hercules retired from the Air Force. I suggested they could be used as water bombing fleet of aircraft for fire fighting – for free! I was not really happy with the replies over time, as they were not interested in this direction. Also, they stated that fighting of bush fires was the State's responsibility.
- With climate change making reduced rain, hotter temperatures and reduced farm productivity prior to this period, obviously to me it would become worse in the future. As has happened, we are in a crisis of catastrophic proportions and we are not equipped to fight these fires. To me, our fire fighters on the ground are doing a marvellous job with what they have but to me it is like fighting a war with sticks and stones.
- What effect would 24 of those C130 water bombers of our own in these troubling times? With up to 200 major fires at any one time over the country, a group of these aircraft operating in unison could have made a significant difference. To be able to achieve control and extinguishing these fires rather than merely trying to contain them between wind and high temperature events in impassable terrain, may have been possible.
- With quick installation equipment for water bombing, these STOL aircraft (Short Take-Off and Landing) are capable of carrying 20 tonnes, operating on small airstrips or grass areas and up in the air in under 500 metres.

Other areas of inactivity,

- Being a multi-function freighter, these aircraft would have been ideal for the basis of a paramilitary style civil National Disaster arm of Government. Being able to carry water or fire retardant for fire bombing, as well as carry vehicles, food, supplies, resources, passengers, deploying relief personnel, in times of need here and overseas. When not in this role, they could be deployed for development in remote areas etc.
- Knowing we have had large periods of little or no rainfall, why weren't water restrictions enacted earlier to conserve storage in Sydney? Why was the desalination plant not turned on earlier to provide additional supply? Our dams were built and considered sufficient when Sydney's population was only 40% of present numbers.
- 35 or so years ago, Perth experienced what we are going through at present in NSW. Their lovely English style gardens were changed to natives and succulents due to reduced rainfall. Hoping for rain and in the right places has killed nations in the past. For example, the Mayan Civilisation on the Yucatan Peninsula and the remnant of the Greek Empire in the Caspian Sea area disappeared due to lack of water.
- In the same ilk of not solving problems because of commercial interests is the recycling industry. Collection is working well but that is as far as it goes. Costs are borne by residents and councils as a result of in many cases, inappropriate packaging. Stockpiles are everywhere due to industry failing to follow up and provide answers. Should Governments legislate answers?

### **Following the fire disaster**

After these horrendous fires across 5 states, it will not be all over. Light rain may grow grass to hold the ground from erosion. If heavy rain comes quickly, loose trees, erosion, infrastructure damage and loss of dwellings and possibly lives will follow.

Being in Tathra around 50 years ago at Christmas time, several flash floods came one after the other. A 30-minute downpour washed 100 or so tents and caravans out beyond the waves. A horrible roar in the night - on inspection in the morning - found the first Bega River Bridge of concrete around 1 kilometre out to sea on a sand bank! This was because the loosened trees from a previous bush fire became a dam behind the bridge with rising waters and pushed it out to sea.

I am guessing the budget surplus is going to be forgotten with the expense of restoring infrastructure. Rail lines, road bridges, utilities, services and support of Australians will need cash. More stock will be lost as well.

All this is happening because of hot water slopping back and forth in the Indian Ocean. When will a National disaster be declared?

### **Construction after the fires**

Following the disastrous fires over NSW, would it be possible to arrange the building standards to improve the fire resistance of dwellings in or around forest areas? Some suggestions,

- Reduce the timber used in house construction.
- Walls preferably of double brick or block construction or even adobe.
- Metal window shutters.
- Roof trussing in metal or possibly earth covered for thermal protection.
- Also, furnishings cannot be considered to be fire proof or resistant but eliminating entry of fire such as reduced external ventilation, eave sealing, chimney dampers, etc.

### **We need to find some solutions for global warming.**

- What the scientists have been telling us for the last 50 years is now here and we are beginning to experience it all.

- Governments have no plan to overcome these problems and commercial interests reinforce the ongoing situation for shareholder benefit.
- Present commercial directions are oriented to having a continual increase in profit and productivity to the detriment of the environment.
- This needs to change for our survival on this planet. There is no plan “B” because there is simply no planet “B”!

### **What next?**

It makes me greatly upset that all the evidence is there and nobody in power and control want to take it seriously. We are experiencing the beginning of a war with nature and it is all our own doing. When will the war room be convened? What good is the economy if there is no ecology in which to enjoy it? It's all not creeping up slowly anymore but is the beginning of the avalanche to come. We are probably going to see waves of temperature near 50 degree summer days in NSW and what is there to come in the future? Australia has the worst record for species extinction! What will be left for our children and grandchildren? After all, this mess is all from our generation and our children and grandchildren will need to clean up the environmental mess we have left for them!