

Your details

Title

Mr

First name

Michael

Last name

Worthing

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Other

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

To; The Bushfire Inquiry Commission.

Dear Dave Owens & Mary O’Kane,

My name is Michael Worthing and my experience may well be of assistance to the investigation on bushfire behaviour and control.

I have been working in and around the bush all my life I held the end of a crosscut saw for dad when I was 10 years old, nearly 60 years ago and since then I have owned a sawmill and then an earthmoving business. From the time dads blitz had the rear wheels and tray burnt whilst parked on a track one weekend during a local bushfire, right through to working my machines on the fire line with National Parks and wildlife Service and RFS and Forestry

commission, I have seen it all.

The first thing I would like to pass on is prevention. Back when I was working full time in the forest the foreman when checking our progress every couple of weeks, used to light up along the roads in the winter. These fires sometimes only burnt back 30 meters or so before the cool dew extinguished them on the first light up, but with perseverance in the passing weeks he would have a burn reaching back off the roads 100 meters to a kilometre. At the same time the stock owners who used to run cattle in the forests did the same thing from horse back, therefore ranging further back into the bush on the ridge trails. This random burn method in my opinion along with the grass reduction the cattle provided is the main reason we did not have the out of control burns we face today.

Having been on some catastrophic fire lines myself there are some other problems I have seen. One of significance is the fact the control of the fire has been taken away from the fire line crew, by this I mean having to keep obtaining permission to utilize means to control the blaze such as starting a back burn or in some cases not being able to light up because of a section 44 declaration. In a lot of cases minutes make all the difference and if the experience of the ground crew is not enough to make these decisions then it is imperative we teach enough fire ground control officers to cope with the job.

Another strategy employed back in the 60's and 70's was to mark out fire plots as they called them in which no machines were allowed. These would be in today's terms ½ a hectare and they would rake up and measure the fuel load, from this information it would be determined how desperate it needed to be burnt and take appropriate action. The people running these conservation measures knew more about the consequences of inaction or preventing fires altogether which was the policy of the NP&W and greens whose ways will ultimately lead to the total destruction of our beautiful and biggest natural renewal resource on our planet, our forests.

Admittedly the weather patterns did not deal the kindest hand with the last perilous fire season but it was not weather alone that caused the tremendous devastation and these weather phases will return maybe not in my life time but it will happen. When I look at the situation of some of the houses and their surrounds it is no wonder they were burnt out. Poor prep and vegetation growing with an arms reach of a dwelling or shed can only be fraught with disaster. In my capacity as an experienced contractor when doing a house site clearing and excavation my advice was always to remove any trees within 50 meters from the building. This was way before the APZ was even thought about. Some clients were a bit green and did not agree but I used to say take the big trees out and plant something you can control.

We keep talking about what has happened with the previous fires but do not change the rules enough to produce a safer environment for the future. I told the heads in the National Parks after the King Creek fire that a group of experienced people should do an audit on the fire with the intent of property ignition causes. This group should contain fire and a police officer, maybe a lawyer and an earthmover with fire fighting experience and a council engineer along with a builder so to have a cross section of experience and ideas. Just watching the news coverage on some of the fires it make me curse to see the main reasons why some homes burn and some remain untouched mainly mismanagement either by the property owners or council regulations. I once asked a council inspector if council would cover the householder if a certain tree he wanted to remain fell over the soon to be constructed house. His answer was no but still refused permission to have it removed. I think in this time of chain of responsibility I would have anyone refusing the owner permission to remove danger trees automatically assume the responsibility of those actions.

I do have more fire experiences I can relay but I do not want to bore the readers as to take away the seriousness of this subject. Suffice to say many lives and properties were lost from firstly weather conditions, preparedness on the property occupiers behalf, rules and regulations along with not enough hazard reduction. I can give some pointers on the proper course on hazard reduction. If you need my opinion on that or any other fire ground matters please feel free to contact me.

Regards Michael Worthing
12/Apr/20



Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images
