

# Inspector General Emergency Management Submission

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## Preamble

I have written this from the position of a person who has lived at Bete Bolong North for more than 70 years, and worked for and with land managers for more than 20 years as a private machinery contractor, fighting fires and keeping tracks and roads open.

The recent devastating fires throughout Gippsland are not caused by Climate Change. Australia is a country of many climates with droughts and floods thrown into the mix. These may make themselves felt at various stages of the years and seasons.

## Preparedness

While the prolonged drought we are experiencing made it drier than normal and more difficult to control fire, the big problem is that governments over recent years have pandered to the Green movement's wishes and reduced fuel reduction burning, as well as locking up more forest areas into National Parks. These National Parks are a loss in every way. They are not maintained and have become over run with weeds and feral animals. They are supposed to protect flora and fauna. They have not. They have done the opposite. These fires within these protected areas have destroyed many species of animals and plants, some of which will never recover. Some of the landscape has been so badly burnt, it will never recover for all time.

Some areas of the forest between Buchan and Bete Bolong N have not been burnt since Xmas 1958. At that time we had a very hot summer and the fires burnt into the farmland, but with no loss of houses or stock.

The equipment used then was the odd dozer, army Blitzes with water tanks and knapsack, rakes and hoes. Not all the modern equipment on display today which never gets near a fire until it is too late.

Over the years, I have witnessed the removal of the older experienced officers to be replaced by the younger university trained officers.

Forest management that was in charge a few years ago had a good knowledge of firefighting and of different forest areas, as they worked up from grass roots level, through the system, instead of going to university level to obtain their position.

Lightning strikes are a natural way that fuel is reduced, but now when a strike occurs it is put out instead of, if conditions permit, letting it burn to reduce fuel loads. Australian plants need fire to regenerate, but not hot fire like we have just experienced.

When lightning sets fires going during hot fire danger times, these fires need to be extinguished as soon as possible. Not let to burn until they cannot be contained.

## Responses

The firefighting methods these days leave a lot to be desired. Machinery and men sitting around fire stations or road junctions till 10 am before deciding to control outbreaks is a disgrace. The best time to fight the fires is during the night or in the early morning, before the heat and wind make it more difficult and dangerous to control these fires.

The quota of hours that can be worked by crews is another issue. If time is up, they pack up and go, not waiting for another crew to take over. Fires do not stand still because hours are up.

Decision making related to the control of fires should be in local hands for a quicker decision making process. Currently decisions about back burns or other actions are passed to Melbourne. By the time a response is made, the window of opportunity has often passed.