



Dear Inspector-General of Emergency Management Tony Pearce,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season. My personal details are below:

Name: Sue Carolane

Email: 

Gender: Female

Age: 55-64

Privacy preference: I would like the Inspector-General to make my submission publicly available

My personal story of the fires:

We were lucky this year - all fires very close to us were small and quickly contained. But every year there is increasing anxiety as late spring/summer approaches. As the climate has changed, everything is drier, the water table has dropped, and extreme temperatures become even more extreme every year.

We were personally impacted by smoke, the aforementioned anxiety, and great concern for the lives and livelihoods of various friends and relatives in Victoria, NSW and ACT. One also wastes much time checking emergency apps, preparing to evacuate (although it wouldn't have been wasted if we had to), and just simply not being able to settle to useful tasks so easily because of the changing situation and anxiety.

I suspect it would be useful to tap into and act upon indigenous expertise on cool burns. I feel the most important antidote to such appalling fire seasons is to address climate change urgently. Of course we will always have bushfires, but it is very clear that the recent fire seasons have dramatically changed in quality and quantity, and that climate change is the culprit.

My response to term of reference: Consider all challenges and implications for bushfire preparedness arising from increasingly longer and more severe bushfire seasons as a result of climate change:

Longer bushfire seasons reduce the window of opportunity for safe and effective hazard reduction burning (see comment about indigenous cool burns in previous response).

The overlap between Northern and Southern hemisphere bushfire seasons is an increasing problem for resource and personnel sharing between the hemispheres.

Climate change has increased bushfire risk by exacerbating severe drought (and therefore resulting in less water with which to fight fires), dry fuels and soil and record-breaking heat. These factors lead to increased bushfire risk and make it harder to prepare for challenging conditions.

Those factors also lead to unprecedented scale and intensity of fires. This reduces the chances of people defending their own properties, which in turn puts more pressure on firefighters.

Fires have changed in their behaviour as a result of the increased scale and intensity, and many have become beyond the capability of humans to control. Instead, all that can be done is to nibble around the edges until it has reduced to more manageable levels.

My response to term of reference: In considering effectiveness of Victoria's operational response to the 2019-20 fire season, IGEM should particularly consider, "planning and response mechanisms to protect biodiversity threatened by bushfire":

Protecting biodiversity threatened (and already wrecked) by bushfire is vital.

Salvage logging should be disallowed in fire-impacted regions, as it compounds the impacts of both fire and logging.

Native forest logging across the state should be halted until an assessment is made of remaining habitat and how biodiversity can be protected. As mentioned in the previous response, old forests should not be logged at all.

Within the burnt areas, islands of unburnt vegetation are crucial natural refuges areas which also assist in recovery of plants and wildlife. These areas must be protected from burning out by fire crews wherever possible.

Biodiversity conservation has not been a priority of the Victorian government in recent years, and this has led to a weak starting position of many species now impacted by fires. This needs to be addressed immediately. Significant biodiversity recovery work is needed. Here is a wonderful way to stimulate regional economies during and following the COVID-19 lockdown.

My response to term of reference: Review of all opportunities and approaches to bushfire preparedness, including different methods of fuel and land management (for example 'cool burning', mechanical slashing, integrated forest management, traditional fire approaches) to protect life and property as well as ecological and cultural values:

It seems that planned burning has been of limited use this fire season, given the severity of the fires and the fact that, as a result of climate change's longer fire seasons and hotter, drier conditions, the window of opportunity is decreasing to safely accomplish planned burns.

Indigenous fire management, as mentioned earlier, would provide solutions here, in terms of both hazard reduction and maintaining habitat (the latter being destroyed by "conventional" planned burns). We need to employ and utilise Aboriginal skills across all fire management activities.

Older growth in forests is less flammable than younger, post-fire growth, so the State needs to set targets to protect and promote growth of older vegetation (like not allowing logging of old growth forests, for a start).

Fuel reduction, including planned burning and slashing, needs to be carried out strategically - i.e. around areas which need protection, such as towns and infrastructure.

I would like to add the following:

A quote from Gerald Durrell, conservationist extraordinaire:
"The world is as delicate and as complicated as a spider's web. If you touch one thread you send shudders running through all the other threads. We're not just touching the web, we're tearing great holes in it."

Durrell died many years ago. Consider how little humans have learned since then.

I would like to make the following recommendations:

Yours sincerely,
Sue Carolane
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