

Jeff McCole

Buchan, 3885,

Jeff's background,

Jeff has been a farmer and bush worker all his life and has lived in Buchan for more than 70 years. Jeff and his wife, Margie lost their home and almost all infrastructure on the farm in Moons Rd, East Buchan.

The points Jeff would like to make are as follows;

▪ **HAZARD Reduction:**

- **Controlled Burns:** Jeff and Margie's home is a single access entry with one road in, one out. Hazard fuel reduction burning for this area was scheduled to take place between the 01st of September 2019 and the 31st of October 2019 after 3 and a half years of lobbying the DELWP for the burning to occur. The signs were placed up and the plans made, however no burning took place in the period that was established. Jeff and Margie requested further action at the start of November 2019 and they were told it will not happen this year as it was too dry and too late to conduct the burn then.

- **Greater Autonomy for regional sectors to manage and control Hazard reduction burning to create more efficient and effective management of burning regime:** Jeff and Margie enquired into why the burns had not taken place through the forecast period with the local sector office. They were told that the staff from the sector had attempted to gain permission to light this burn three times however each time, by the time the permissions were granted either the local conditions had changed, it was too late in the day or there was no appropriately qualified staff in the office to sign off on the burn.

Jeff wants to see changes in the administration processes that create more Autonomy for regional sectors to plan and carry out the hazard reduction burns, in order to make the process more efficient. This may mean the need for increased training and changes to protocols to create systems and frameworks that allow for the types of stringent due diligence to be carried out to maintain safe practices, However Jeff believes this is the best way to see increased efficiency in hazard reduction burning.

- **Increased DELWP workers on the ground both seasonally and year-round:**

Jeff believes the number of workers covering our parks and bush has continued to drop over the past 40 years and the bush is worse for it. Due to changes in workers and industries and caretakers the bush has changed over the last 30 years and has begun to deteriorate with the impacts of several mega blazes of which this summer's fire is the worst in living memory in the Buchan River Catchment. In the last century and before all those who worked or lived in the bush took on some caretaking responsibility for maintaining and managing for the bush, and before then it was managed by the traditional land managers the 5 clans of the Gunai Kurnai across much of our country.

Since the late 1990's there has been an increase in restrictions and a change in the restrictions making it all but impossible for landowners to burn in or around their properties or maintain bush by removing fuel loads. This reduction of in kind labor has not been replaced by more land managers, instead we have seen a reduction in land managers and they are also centralized and housed at Nowa Nowa, removing industry and economic revenue from our small community, contributing to further economic challenge of our small town which has also lost the majority of its logging industry, with no Timber mills in

operation in a catchment that at one point housed 5 mills. We need more parks or DELWP workers on the ground to get around and keep the tracks open, roadsides and river banks cleaned up and prepare the country for sectors to be hazard reduction burnt when the conditions allow. The build up of this work is often so great that areas cannot be prepared in time to be burnt when the conditions and seasons align, leaving a combustible ticking time bomb, that should the extreme weather occur will result in a major fire event. More staff doing more prevention work needs to be implemented in order to support greater quantities of cool hazard reduction burns.

- **Road Edges and River Banks:** These spaces had not been maintained and this lead to these spaces acting as “Wicks” with the fire travelling quickly and extensively along these conduits and often flowing on into farms and privately owned land and assets such as fences and sheds.
- **Fire fighting efforts:**
 - **Fire fighting response:** Jeff and Margie felt the local actions and fire fighting was conducted efficiently and effectively. Jeff feels the people on the ground did the best they could with the materials and assets they had.
 - **Emergency Advice/ Escape route advice:** The emergency advice directing people to evacuate via the Buchan-Orbost Road, to Orbost, was not only inappropriate but extremely dangerous. We are very lucky peoples lives were not lost here. The fire at Bete Belong North and Bete-Belong was catastrophic and overwhelming.
 - **Emergency Safe Place:** Buchan is remote with at least a 30 minute commute to go somewhere else. In a situation where there is a code red day, that is too far to travel if you have existing fire in the landscape. Each of the routes out of Buchan are heavily forested for long stretches. The Buchan Recreation Ground is and has been proven to be a Safe place that can be defended even in extreme fire events. This location was our sanctuary providing us with a protectable place for the community to shelter and ride out the fire.
- **Immediate after marth:**
 - **Road verges need further clearing and cleaning up;** The proximity and amount of fuel and dangerous trees on roadsides created a entrapment situation for several weeks, as there were so many dangerous trees, which needed to be made safe. We can see the effectiveness of having large fire breaks and fuel reduction burns by seeing how successfully the fire was able to be held on the Bruthen-Nowa Nowa section of the Princess highway.
 - **Fodder;** There was still a great deal of challenge getting the fodder in for live stock due to the dangers associated with the fire effected roads.
 - **Facilities:** The Buchan Recreation Pavilion and Grounds was a great sanctuary where everyone felt safe and were able to be supported and catered for, albeit in a very day to day, moment to moment fashion. This place is the gathering place which continues to be where people congregate due to our geographic location and the factors impacting people’s capacity to travel out of our valley during emergencies. The Recreation Ground was not well enough provisioned or big enough for the needs of a community/district our size (Whole catchment gathered here) or to cater to the firefighters and emergency staff who were trapped in the town with us. It needs improved power supply, (generator) more undercover space for people who are frail to gather in. There were several 40 degree plus days during and after this fire event, where the elderly and infirmed were heavily impacted by exposure to the weather smoke and other challenging elements. The grounds and facilities need to be upgraded to meet the needs of our district in emergency situations. Improvements should include fixed internet and phone access, better access to water and improved cooking facilities, replacement and

improvement to the pump/irrigator which expired during the extensive use it endured over this fire season.

- **Phones, Power and Communications:** The town lost phone access for in excess of 10 days, and further up the valley towards Gelantipy and W-Tree there are spaces where there is still no access to phones three months on. Internet access was also lost. Power was also lost for these locations for extended periods.
- **Water Supply:** The water supply was lost during the fire fight and the pressure was not adequate for people to properly defend their homes. The treatment plant also broke down in the days following the fire and the town was completely without water for two days. There are ongoing issues with the quality of our water and people are reluctant to drink the water without boiling it and it leaves scum in the pot when boiled. Water is an ongoing battle for our community.
- **State of emergency and managing the recovery:**
 - **Financial support:** It took a few weeks for the support to get to us and once here it was effective. Most of the support we received has been private or charity based.