



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: Teresa Olszanka

Email: 

Gender: Female

Age: 65-74

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

My personal story of the fires:

I am fortunate not to have been directly affected by bushfires. Just indirectly by the smoke that engulfed the area where I live for about 2-3 days. The smoke prevented me from going outside because it caused me to cough and gave me a headache. What bothered me a lot more was the awareness of what was going on out there: burning bush, burning animals, burning communities. The bush and the suffering of animals bothered me the most. They were the innocent victims of human carelessness, avarice, and

mindlessness. Our current and previous cabinets. Those in government are expected to be leaders having a long term vision. They don't have any vision, no imagination. Sadly. The photo of a lone kookaburra sitting on a scorched branch of a scorched tree, surrounded by scorched forest as far as the eye could see. This highly distressing image will stay in my mind for a long, long time. I did develop depression. The extent of the environmental catastrophe as overwhelming and there was nothing I could do.

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: 1.2 million hectares of bush destroyed by fire. A tragedy largely preventable if only the consecutive governments did not pretend climate change wasn't happening. Farmers and park rangers were reporting higher soil temperatures causing trees to begin to die. The land was parched by years of drought. What is happening now was predicted some 15 years ago. I read an article in the Age which outlined how the events caused by climate change will unfold. Which parts of Australia will be affected first and how. Everything is playing out as described in the article I read 15 years ago. The Governments one after another ignored the voice of scientists. Last year the scientists were sounding the alarm bells about the possibility of catastrophic bush fire season. Where is the Government, may I ask? Where is the Government's focus? On beliefs and prayers?? Humanity left the Dark Ages 500 years ago. A catastrophe like the last season fires cannot

happen again. 1/Australian government MUST secure sufficient fire fighting aircraft BEFORE fire season. A surplus on standby is much better than barely there. France has more aircraft than Australia has despite having nowhere near the acreage of inaccessible bush. 2/we need professional well-equipped firefighters. The rest of the world was aghast that Australia relies on volunteer firefighters. 3/the government needs to pay attention to what the farmers are saying - I have been involved in supporting the organization Farmers For Climate Change. Farmers should be able to focus on their work, not on lobbying the government to remind them of their existence, let alone defending their farms against fracking companies. It's absurd. The lack of respect for farmers on the part of government is unacceptable. 4/there needs to be substantial improvement in water management. Thus far we can easily call it mismanagement. Trading allocations have to go. Farmers need to have priority over multinationals to access water. Someone needs to hold the government to account for their decisions. Right now it's a cowboy/western frontier territory. An independent professional and competent body needs to be established. This body needs to have "teeth". 5/we need government capable of stepping out of reliance on fossil fuels. A government capable of forming long term policies.

My response to term of reference: In considering the 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":

Islands of unburnt vegetation within burnt areas MUST be protected from burning out - these islands provide refuge to wildlife.

Salvage logging cannot be allowed. It disturbs forests during the critical recovery stage.

Logging across the entire state must be halted until such time that ecologists are able to assess what habitat is left and how to protect the biodiversity. The extent of habitat destruction has been of unprecedented proportion. It's been catastrophic. The government must do everything to protect and preserve what's left. This in particular that the Victorian government FAILED to prioritize biodiversity which weakened the starting position of species not impacted by fires.

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:

Regarding the planned burns, the government should consult the Aboriginal groups who have long experience and skills in fire prevention and management. Planned burns may become tricky as the fire season is beginning earlier and becoming longer. Much more Aboriginal input is required. Extensive bushfires affected Gippsland, just the area which underwent planned burns 2x between 2003-2017. Something went badly wrong. 1/attention has to be paid to preventing draining of swamps for the convenience of the developers. Swamps act as natural barriers to fire. We are losing swamps 2/Old growth forest, mature trees have to be protected from

logging. What has been happening in Victoria is indiscriminate mass removal of trees for no apparent reason, except giving in to developers, and despite the protests of the residents, and without the consequences when trees are removed illegally at night. Most people are aware of it. The government looks the other way. Government's own agency [REDACTED] has been caught conducting inappropriate loggings. It's high time the government takes control over the unruly [REDACTED]

I would like to add the following:

ICEM should particularly focus on the planning and response mechanism to protect biodiversity impacted by the bushfires

I would like to make the following recommendations:

To examine the preparedness for the bushfires in the light of climate change. What was being done before may not be appropriate now. There are fewer cool, still days with the right weather for preventive burns. To examine what caused the Gippsland area which was particularly badly affected by the latest bushfires despite having undergone planned burns between 2003–04 and 2016–17. Over 2 million hectares of native vegetation was burnt in planned fires in Victoria, much of them concentrated in the eastern part of the state. The Gippsland region of Victoria accounted for the largest area of planned burns during the period, with 829,000 hectares or 39% of the total planned-burning area. Yet it's done nothing to prevent catastrophe.

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Olszanka

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