

## **Submission to the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season**

I will begin my submission by stating that I am not a firefighter or associated with the CFA. I am a landowner on the Mornington Peninsula and in East Gippsland (Dellicknora). Like many people, I watched in horror as the fires spread. We were fortunate in that our property was not lost in Dellicknora, but we spent many, many days in fear that we would soon lose our property.

What occurred to me during these fires was how many times *it appeared* that fires would make a start somewhere and be “allowed” to spread. I wondered how quickly we were able to respond after the first report of a fire. I also wondered why, with so much to lose, we only had access to one Erickson helicopter (to the best of my knowledge).

It seems to me there are two issues: the number of helicopters at the State’s disposal, and the time it would take to respond so that a fire could be extinguished before it spread. I believe my submission, although not inexpensive, would solve both problems.

### **Executive summary**

- Focus on putting out fires when they start.
- Buy or lease more (Erickson) helicopters and locate them at strategic locations so they can reach new fires quickly.
- Build small dams near rivers, topped up by solar-powered pumps, so helicopters did not need to fly far to refill.

### **More helicopters**

The “obvious” solution is to acquire more helicopters for a longer period of time, and position them strategically around the State so they are able to reach fires relatively quickly.

Although Victoria has a lot more to worry about than my property up in Dellicknora, I suspect many properties were lost, and thousands of hectares lost because a fire started in a remote location, and nothing could be done about it quickly enough to stop it spreading.

Therefore, it would make sense, to me, to locate the helicopters in locations such as Bairnsdale, Orbost, Cann River, etc. Obviously, additional analysis must be performed to select the best location(s).

### **Additional water sources**

I would suspect that part of the problem is the availability of water. While a helicopter may be able to take off fully loaded from Orbost, for example, if one load of water was not enough to put out the fire, the question then becomes where must the helicopter fly in order to reload.

While I imagine that rivers such as the Snowy River may provide safe access to helicopters, I would imagine that the helicopters might have to fly quite some distance before finding safe access to an adequate volume of water.

Part two of my proposal is to build small dams in valleys very close to existing rivers.

- The dam would hold enough water to fill a helicopter a minimum of 10 times (without it sucking up mud, etc.).

- The dam would be located close to a river so that a solar-powered pump would keep the dam topped up.
- The dam site would be chosen so a helicopter could safely approach the dam, extract the water, and safely fly away.
- Of course, in wetter months, and during storms, rain and the resulting water flowing down the valley would feed the dam. Dams would not be located where there is already a creek in order to minimize the impact on the environment.

While there may be an impact on the environment when building these small dams, one would hope that the greater good of protecting the forests (and infrastructure and lives) would overcome that impact.

It would be necessary to identify areas where the helicopter had to fly more than five minutes, for example, to refill. The faster it can refill, the faster it can return to the ignition point of the fire and put it out.

### **For what it is worth**

While there has been a lot of discussion about controlled burns, and there have been controlled burns up near our property in Dellicknora, I personally question the benefit of these fires:

- Some of those fires get out of control
- Many of those fires only burn at the ground level whereas the major fires travel through the treetops as well
- There is a smaller window of appropriate weather and conditions to conduct these fires which means it is more likely that risks will have to be taken in order to keep up with the demand to set these fires
- While native plants need occasional fires to regenerate, and while certain weeds need to be kept under control, I do worry about the impact on native animals when we implement controlled burns

### **Conclusion**

I hope my submission might spark an idea that will help us avoid future bushfires.

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