

Submission Number: NND.001.01207

Submission Of: John Vukovich

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my personal situation

What was your personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires?

Where do you live? Bunbury

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

Wide scale prescribed burning should stop and be replaced by strategic fuel reduction around habitation.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

I lived in Dwellingup which was destroyed by the 1961 fires although I was not there during the fires.

Previous Royal Commissions have come to similar conclusions as the above.

REPORT OF THE 1939 ROYAL COMMISSION

The Causes of and Measures Taken to Prevent the Bush Fires of January, 1939. (pp 10-13) (Conclusion)

The causes, of the fires under discussion are set out as follows:—

(a) Dry Season and Dry Forests.— Further elaboration is unnecessary.

(b) The Condition of the Forests.— When the early settlers came to what is now this State, they found for the greater part a clean forest.

Apparently for many years before their arrival, the forest had not been scourged by fire. They were in their natural state.

Their canopies had prevented the growth of scrub and bracken to any wide extent. They were open and traversible by men, beasts and wagons.

Compared with their present condition, they were safe. But the white men introduce fire to the forests. They burned the floor to promote the growth of grass and to clear it of scrub which had grown where, for whatever reason, the balance of nature had broken down. The fire stimulated grass growth, but it encouraged scrub growth far more. Thus was begun the cycle of destruction which cannot be arrested in our day. The scrub grew and flourished, fire was used to clear it, the scrub grew faster and thicker, bush fires, caused by the careless or designing hand of man, ravaged the forests; the canopy was impaired, more scrub grew and prospered, and again the cleansing agent, fire, was used.

The European settlers in NSW named the Blue Mountains after the blue haze which engulfed the Great Dividing Range. It was later found that the blue haze was caused by eucalyptus vapour emitted from the leaves of the Eucalypt forest. Later still it was found that the eucalyptus vapour was a fire accelerant and recently, tests showed that a lightning strike would probably not cause ignition without the vapour being present.

Burning the forest removes fuel and the vapour-producing leaves but it also removes shade from the forest floor and deposits temporary nutrients which leads to a burst of growth of saplings which in turn produces masses of eucalyptus vapour-producing leaves. These saplings compete for scarce deep nutrients and that stunts the growth of trees. This results in a stunted forest with masses of flammable saplings engulfed in eucalyptus vapour which only needs an ignition source to start a wildfire.

Practices of scrub rolling, roading, thinning and poisoning associated with logging also remove shade from the forest floor and along with logging and burning, emit huge amounts of greenhouse gases which dry and warm the climate, causing increased severity and frequency of fires.

The Royal Commission into the fire which destroyed Dwellingup in 1961 revealed that the fire that raged from the north of the town roared through country in which "considerable controlled burning had been done in the forest north of the town in the past two years. " This fire was ignited by lightning strikes.

The recent Northcliffe fire was also started by lightning strikes in forest which had been prescribed burnt 5 years before. Obviously prescribed burns at the recommended period of 5 to 7 years are not effective but are still promoted by Government agencies and the timber industry.

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