



Succinct Submission to the Bushfire Royal Commission

from The Republican Party of Australia [The RPA]

With the given opportunity, The RPA tenders this Succinct Submission for consideration by the Commissioners...

Between September 2019 and early February 2020 bushfires raged through many parts of Australia following a pronounced three-year drought which impacted Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and beyond to South Australia, Kangaroo Island and also along the Eyre Highway across the Nullabor Plain in to Western Australia.

A severe water rationing regime was introduced as both metropolitan and rural/regional dams throughout Queensland and New South Wales progressively dried up. Many regional towns had to be topped up [re-supplied] with fresh water per road tankers and countless stacks of bottled water.

During December 2019 and January 2020 – driven by typical hot Summer West and North-Westerly winds – bushfires (many reportedly lit by arsonists) broke containment lines and raged quite uncontrollably destroying businesses, private properties, farm infrastructure, power lines and telecommunication network facilities etc.

Escape by road became impossible for the citizens of many coastal communities along the New South Wales South Coast and Victorian East Gippsland regions as huge bushfires cut off all access to or from by road.

Indeed, a State of Emergency was declared by the governments of both New South Wales & Victoria. Live television footage of the drama was beamed throughout the World.

Residents and holiday-makers alike had few options...they were forced to abandon almost everything as the perceived infernos advanced on to them. Many were ultimately forced to seek shelter from the raging fires on coastal beaches, in makeshift tents and community halls. Some, even in their vehicles!

The 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfire Emergency resulted in Australia's largest ever Peacetime exodus which was akin to the World War 2 mass evacuations from Dunkirk on the European Continent.

The Australian Navy were called upon to rescue some 100,000 residents and Festive Season holiday-makers who were literally trapped by the soaring conditions.

General relief finally arrived around 8th-9th February when drenching, soaking rains quenched the flames pretty effectively in the two worst-hit regions (Southern Coastal NSW and East Gippsland) within a few days.

Moreover, a force of nature transformed the dire situation. Alas, though, widespread heavy rainfall – extending into many parts of Southern Queensland – caused much local flooding. Dams, empty or near-empty for many months, refilled within days and creeks & rivers began flowing again. Within a very short time-span the proverbial “green shoots” re-appeared and pastures recovered.

Australia’s Black Summer Bushfires horror virtually retired in to history when water restrictions – particularly in metropolitan Sydney – were eased as Warragamba Dam and other dams in the Sydney Water Catchment area boosted their water stocks by more than 50% over the levels that obtained in drought-declared, recent times.

Whilst full details of the impacts and total true costs will not become tallied until the Royal Commission makes public its absolute findings in late August, 2020 – schedulely – interim preliminary reports indicate the following:

33 lives lost;
some 20 million hectares obliterated;
approximately 3780 homes/domiciles destroyed;
an estimated 1 billion native fauna killed.

Drought and bushfires go hand-in-glove with one another in Terra Australis. They are by no means uncommon in the Australian landscape. This has been the way of things for millions of years and will remain the case in to the distant future.

Doubtless, many lessons were learnt in the 2019-2020 Horrendous Summer but it is not an exaggeration to assert that many lessons learnt in previous bushfire seasons were not translated in to practical action. I understand that this Inquiry is the 58th held since early colonial settlement. It behoves ALL Commissioners to read the 57 forerunning reports and highlight where the key recommendations weren’t followed or ignored.

Granted, the 20 million hectares burned was tragic. However, some realistic perspective needs to be introduced in comparator fashion...in the bushfires of the 1974-1975 bushfire season some 120 million hectares were obliterated – more than 6 times the density.

Australian aborigines learned long ago how best to use fire as a tool for managing bushlands in their perpetual quest for survival. The First Australians knew and well-understood the concepts of ‘FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE’ and ‘cultural burning’. Indigenous Australians were

well-verses in fire management being as they were adherents of ‘traditional fire laws’. Moreover, the First Australians knew the importance of reducing fuel loads to manage their meat and food supply lines over more than 40,000 years.

Rural Australians grow up with the annual threat of bushfires and learn that a bushfire needs 3 components: (a) oxygen + (b) fuel + (c) heat. This mix is generally known as the ‘Fire Triangle’. The ‘Triangle’, per se, is effectively a balance of causes thus: First-Order causes are farm machinery + motor vehicles + power lines + arsonists in addition to oxygen and fuel (dry vegetation); Second-Order causes (which enhance First-Order causes) are drought + criminal justice and mental health systems which fail to control arson + hot temperatures + low humidity + hot winds whilst Third-Order causes e.g. the Indian Ocean dipoles + El Nino climate patterns and, very minimally, global warming.

Given that an authoritatively-estimated 85% of bushfires are ignited by human beings, there is immense scope for the reversal of these listed First-Order causes whilst allowing for a negligible 1.3% increase in the nation’s global emissions. My ultimate conclusion is that ‘Climate Change’ as an issue is a non-modifiable risk factor.

Many Australian plants and trees evolved over millennia such as they actually require bushfires to enable their seeds to burst through in preparation for the next drenching cycle which inevitably follows major bushfires. Sooner or later, as the case may be.

A major problem for a protracted period of time has been that Australian governments of ALL stripes – both Federal and State – have UNwittingly created fire hazards by trying to wrap vast areas of natural vegetation in cotton wool and green tape [*both, by the way, which are flammable!]. Indubitably, government so-called ‘protection’ of native flora and fauna has proved to be the fiery ‘kiss of death’.

In the absence of empirical evidence to the contrary, the claims that carbon dioxide (CO₂) in Australia’s atmosphere is the root cause of ‘global warming’ – a concept that has conveniently morphed in to the term ‘climate change’ – are UNproven. CO₂ has far more benefits for forests than dangers since it promotes vegetation to grow more vigorously, even more luxuriantly, and in to the bargain makes forests more resistant to drought.

Thus, the environment thrives. And Australia’s fauna thrives. The main downside, of course, is for those Australians who stupidly choose to make their homes in the middle of the Australian bush.

The above-mentioned outline having been stated, The RPA now proffers a 5-Point Plan for practical, future **Federal** bushfire management, control and/or containment:

1. Appoint more qualified (trained and experienced) foresters to maintain safe and healthy forests. These appointees should be given authority and resources for reducing fuel loads especially in national parks and forests by cool seasonal burning or by combinations of

timber harvesting, slashing/mulching and collecting dead firewood. Private landowners must be enabled and obliged to become fire-safe and subject to the diktats of local fire wardens.

2. Create and maintain wide, clear trafficable roads, tracks and firebreaks through the forests and around towns/townships as well as private properties. In fire seasons these patrolled fire-barriers will help to confine any fire to mainly one sector and, concurrently, provide a prepared line from which to back-burn – especially if there is an approaching fire.
3. Appropriately, the penalties for proven arson in times of high fire danger, should be seriously and emphatically increased.
4. Build more dams and weirs to provide (a) for fire-fighting needs; (b) havens for humans and native fauna simultaneously and (c) water security in broadranging terms.
5. Establish a **Federal** Sustainable Land Management Department per a vital National Referendum to alter the Commonwealth Constitution for such purposes.