

002798 (3)
25 MAR 2002

"West Wind" Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
Lakesland N.S.W. 2572
14-3-2002
Phone 02 46809277

The Secretary

Joint Select Committee Re Bush Fire Emergency.

Dear Sir/Madam

The enclosed documents have not only been addressed and sent to those Departments or Ministers concerned, ~~the~~ copies were also sent to between 20 and thirty related Ministers and or Departments as well as various newspapers (all were published).

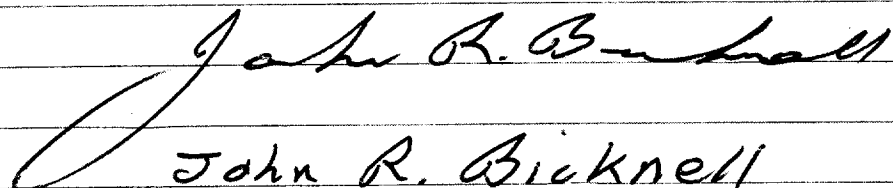
I wish to have these documents included as a submission to the Joint Select Committee on advice from some Parliamentarians and Bush Fire Personnel.

The issues, include ways forward to alleviate fire hazards, as well as the problems which need to be resolved.

As can be seen, some points have been highlighted as being of special interest, including the dates that these documents were sent or received.

Thank you for your interest in the fire situation, I look forward to common sense at last.

Yours Faithfully


John R. Bicknell

Orchard Industry Action Group
C/- West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

23 July 1998

The Honorable Pam Allan
Minister for the Environment
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Allan

Of enormous concern is the "Cumberland Plain Woodland" study nominated under the Threatened Species Act (even though only the Camden Eucalypt and one small ground cover plant may possibly be in short supply) which is to be finalised by September 1998 for approval by the NSW State Government.

Cumberland Plain "Woodland" is a misleading name in that it encompasses all vegetation from grasses to trees. The vast majority of these plants commonly occur in most other areas of NSW.

There seems to be a mad scramble by the lunatic fringe Greens to get their fifteen minutes of fame by imposing, on an unsuspecting population, legislation which can be detrimental, and even downright dangerous, to persons and property.

Most of the plants covered by Cumberland Plain Woodland are extremely hazardous when ignited by fire, especially in drought situations, yet the Greenies pushing for its preservation and propagation want it preserved and propagated up to our back doors, fences, sheds, crops, etc. Even the smallest amount of remnant vegetation is considered to be of the utmost importance, yet it is to be found commonly in most areas of NSW.

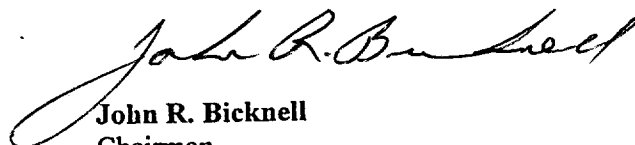
People have very short memories. The fires that devastated vast areas, such as Menai and Burratorang Valley, were caused through a lack of hazard reduction which had not been carried out in previous seasons. Aborigines used fire as a tool to clear such vegetation as Cumberland Plain Woodland to expose wide expanses of land to new growth, on which their prey would graze, yet the Greenies want to preserve it for all time. What stupidity!

Insurance companies would be very interested in residences and properties of enforced Cumberland Plain Woodland. Knowing that it is a fire hazard, the insurance companies would probably increase the premiums, or possibly in the worst cases refuse insurance altogether.

Councils, which will have to enforce the legislation, will eventually find that people who subsequently lose their home, crops, business, etc may take the matter to court under a class action for gross culpability. In this case, we will all be forced to pay by way of higher rates.

Cumberland Plains Woodland may have a place in National Parks so long as it is kept under strict control. It has no part to play in the agricultural, industrial or residential areas.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell
Chairman
Orchard Industry Action Group

Orchard Industry Action Group
C/- West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

3 September 1998

The Mayor
Cr Marina Voncina
Wollondilly Shire Council
PICTON NSW 2571

Dear Marina

CUMBERLAND PLAIN WOODLAND - Some Points to Ponder

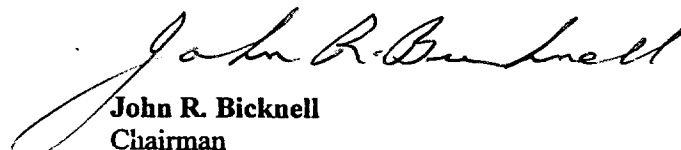
Once an area of Cumberland Plain Woodland has been identified:

1. Who maintains the area?
2. Will an Environmental Police Force be employed to enforce legislation?
3. Under whose direction and control will the Environmental Police Force be?
4. Who pays the Environmental Police Force?
5. What are the legal implications of an Environmental Police Force?

Areas declared as Cumberland Plain Woodland which is owned by ratepayers, leave many unanswered questions:

1. Will the rate payer be compensated for loss of potential income earning capacity?
2. Will the Council decrease the rates payable by the owner in accordance with the area declared Cumberland Plain Woodland?
3. Who pays the surveyor to measure the area of Cumberland Plain Woodland to be set aside?
4. Who pays for the fencing to stop degradation by stock, vehicles, etc?
5. Will the fencing exclude native animals?
6. Who advises the Valuer General's Department of the change in status of that block of land, which has now effectively been devalued for the owner?
7. Would Council or the State Government be required to purchase that area of Cumberland Plain Woodland from the owner? If so, the above questions would become more significant.
8. Access by the Environmental Police Force would be a contentious issue. What will be the rights of the owner?
9. Will an easement be required by the Council (or body responsible) to gain access in areas where the owner's property is to be traversed? If so, who pays for the registration of the easement?
10. Will the Environmental Police Force be able to enter a property for inspection at any time, or will an appointment be made with the owner?
11. If the area catches fire, who is responsible to put out the fire, given the perceived sensitivity of the area?
12. Will the general public agree to this precedent of invasive investigation and control of private land? One's home will no longer be one's castle.

Yours faithfully



John R. Bicknell
Chairman
Orchard Industry Action Group

Orchard Industry Action Group
C/- West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

29 December 1998

NSW Nurserymans Association
Attention: Jocelyn John

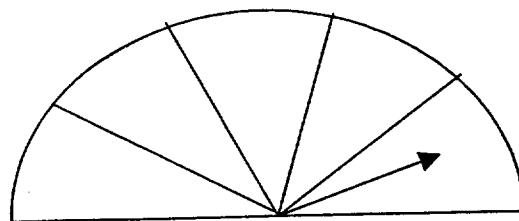
Dear Jocelyn

Your name and Association have been given to me by Rodney Hickman as a point of first contact and possible advice.

Over the past few years bush fires have been the cause of much damage and loss of life. It may be possible to considerably reduce this by a simple logo attached to the tickets of plants sold by nurseries.

As you are no doubt aware, plants are either fire retardant or highly volatile, depending on the concentration of natural oils and the dryness of the surrounding bush.

Using the Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade information pointer board idea, it may be possible to educate people as to the volatility to fire of the plants around their homes, businesses, etc by attaching or including this logo on the ticket describing the plant/s.

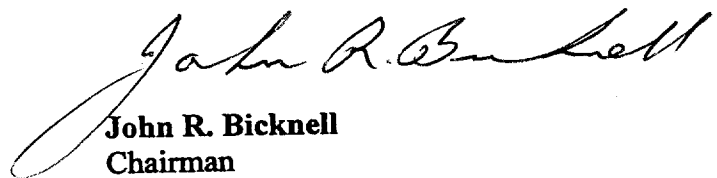


Fire Hazard Rating

Pointer (not moveable but
printed on per hazard
rating of each plant)

Over a period of time people may come to recognize plants surrounding their homes as being fire retardant or highly volatile and be able to make choices accordingly.

Yours faithfully


John R. Bicknell
Chairman
Orchard Industry Action Group

All communications to be addressed to:

Head Office
NSW Rural Fire Service
Locked Mail Bag 17
Granville NSW 2142

Telephone: (02) 9684 4411

e-mail: firstname.lastname@bushfire.nsw.gov.au

Head Office
NSW Rural Fire Service
Unit 3, 175-179 James Ruse Drive
Rosehill NSW 2142

Facsimile: (02) 9638 7956



Mr J.R. Bicknell
Chairman
Orchard Industry Action Group
C/- West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Your Ref:
Our Ref: num0152

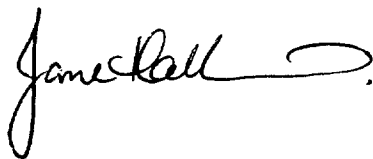
- 7 JAN 1999

Dear Mr Bicknell

On behalf of Commissioner Phil Koperberg, I acknowledge receipt of your recent letter concerning the attaching of relevant information to tickets describing plants.

The matters raised are receiving appropriate attention and a response will be forwarded to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Jane Hollier
Executive Assistant

20 JAN 1999

The Hon. Richard Bull, M.L.C.
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and
Leader of the National Party in the Legislative Council
Shadow Minister for Agriculture &
Shadow Minister for Racing and Gaming



Legislative Council Parliament House
Macquarie Street SYDNEY NSW 2000
Tel: (02) 9230 2397 Fax: (02) 9230 2980
E-mail: cbull@parliament.nsw.gov.au

15th January 1999

Dr Liz Kernohan
Member for Camden
2 Hill Street
CAMDEN NSW 2570

Dear Liz,

Thank you for forwarding to me a copy of correspondence you received from Mr John Bicknell concerning the labelling of nursery plants in terms of their resistance or volatility to bush fires.

I think Mr Bicknell's suggestion has great merit and would serve to make people aware of just how prone the plants they choose to surround their homes with, are to fire.

I am happy to look at this proposal for possible inclusion in the Coalition's agriculture policy.

Thankyou for bringing the issue to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Richard Bull'.

The Hon Richard Bull, MLC.



NATIONALS

COUNTRY

first



**MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Level 9 St James Centre 111 Elizabeth Street Sydney 2000
Telephone: (02) 9233 4044 Facsimile: (02) 9233 3617

In reply please quote: NP 99/00009

Mr John Bicknell
Chairman
Orchard Industry Action Group
c/- West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

12 FEB 1999

Dear Mr Bicknell

The Minister for the Environment, the Hon Pam Allan MP, has asked me to respond to your letter of 29 December 1998 concerning fire hazard ratings on plants. Please accept my apologies for the delay in providing a response.

The Minister thanks you for your suggestion of educating people about the volatility of the plants around their homes by including a logo on the tickets of plants sold by nurseries.

The Minister considers that your suggestion has merit and accordingly, a copy of your letter has been forwarded to the Minister for Agriculture, the Hon Richard Amery MP for his consideration and reply directly to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz Phelps', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

LIZ PHELPS
Policy Adviser
to the Minister for the Environment

West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

8 March 1999

The Editor
«newspaper»

Dear Editor

"Wildlife Corridors", as proposed by the "Green Movement" and implemented by Councils under the direction of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, are a good idea in that these corridors could allow migration of some nomadic indigenous animals from one area to another.

Those "Wildlife Corridors" however are a two-edged sword, or to use another metaphor, to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction (Newton's Third Law). To minimize the action will in turn minimize the reaction.

If these "Wildlife Corridors" are not kept under control by controlled hazard reduction methods (action) and the fuel loads reach dangerous levels, the "Wildlife Corridors" could easily become "Wildfire Corridors", not only incinerating wildlife trapped in them, but also devastating the corridor's flora for many years to come, rendering them useless for surviving wildlife trapped in pockets of unburnt areas (reaction).

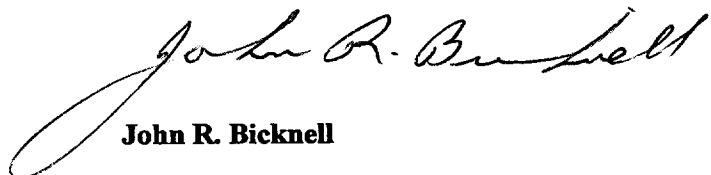
Any persons or property which may be in the vicinity of the wildfire could also be lost.

I was reminded by a good friend that the "old timers" used to refer to headlands, creeks (riparian land) and roadside scrub, etc as being the "wicks" which, when ignited at the wrong time, led to an explosion of fire and consequent devastation.

It is of great importance that these "wicks" be trimmed and kept under control by hazard reduction on a cyclical basis of at least every two to five years, thus giving good controlled training for bushfire fighting personnel, enabling them to hone their skills and safety procedures. Regeneration of the flora would be assured, and wildlife for the most part would be untouched.

It is time to tell the "lunatic fringe greenies" that enough is enough. Good management and balance is required. No more pussy-footing around, trying not to hurt their feelings - too much is at stake.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell

West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

29 March 1999

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

The Editor
«newspaper»

Dear Sir or Madam

A trip to Audley National Park should be a must for all people who are sceptical about the use of hazard reduction methods, as not only the understorey was burnt to a cinder. Most of the long-standing, mature trees were also totally decimated, as well as the wildlife. It will take many years to recover.

Why wasn't hazard reduction implemented? Was it because the "Greenies" insisted on no human interference? Or some other reason? Whatever the reason, it was certainly wrong.

Planting trees and ensuring they be given the opportunity of reaching maturity should be the aim of all Australians, not just environmental groups. Understanding the nature and properties (such as fire hazard ratings) of native and introduced species of plants, and their management in close proximity to housing etc, is an exacting exercise which, it would seem, many in environmental groups do not grasp.

In today's Australia with all the equipment, technology and know-how at our disposal, we still stand aghast and in awe as uncontrollable wildfires wreak havoc because fire hazard reduction has not taken place for whatever reason.

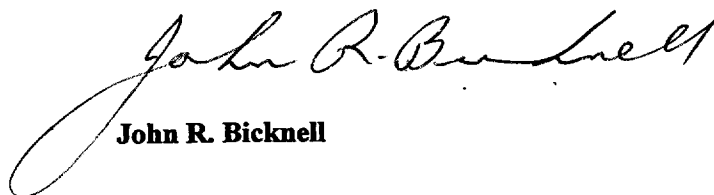
Councils should be very wary of "Green" groups who advocate "Total Environment" policies, i.e. no human interference. It is necessary to carry out hazard reduction to ensure regeneration and to give the chance of long life to mature trees, not to mention the safety of people and property.

No apologies should ever be given to groups that advocate "Total Environment" policies as, distinct from our nomadic forebears, settled people are now a part of the environment.

The environment will serve us well if and when we learn to manage it correctly. To leave it alone is not to manage it. Nature is not kind; it is totally unforgiving.

Question: if an area of "Total Environment" were to be set alight by lightning, would the "Total Environment" lobby groups insist on human interference to put it out, or would they insist on leaving nature to put it out? After all, lightning is a part of nature and the environment.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell

West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

12 April, 1999

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

The Editor
«newspaper»

Dear Sir or Madam

The idea of "Fire Hazard Ratings" of plants struck a chord with both Labor and Coalition parties as having "great merit" and worthy of being included in policy platforms for investigation and, hopefully, implementation and enforcement.

The downside (isn't there always a catch?) is economic, and also opposition from some "green" groups. Why is this so?

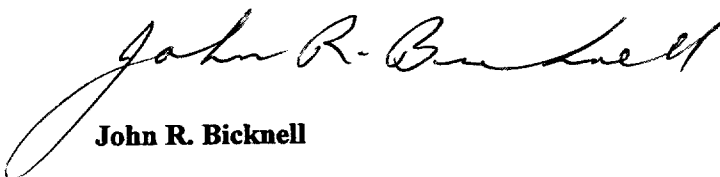
On the economic side, some plant nursery people propagate and deal in plants which would be rated as being in the High, Very High or Extreme fire hazard category, many of which are Australian native species. Their argument is that they would be put out of business as people and councils would not buy those plants at all.

Advice is the "green" groups, wanting very much for people to plant Australian native species up to their back doors, are aghast at the idea, as they are adamant that "corridors" of Australian native flora, such as Cumberland Plain Woodland, must be reinstated, criss-crossing areas of mass housing wherever possible. Categorising plants would work against their whole ethos.

Education and balance are the keys to the problem. People are not stupid, most are environmentally aware. Children are now being taught environmental responsibilities at school. If plants are in high, very high or extremely high fire categories they should be planted well away from buildings, fences, etc, where they can be monitored and kept under control by hazard reduction methods.

If the "Greens" have their way by having Cumberland Plain Woodland legislated and enforced, or the economic imperative creates an impasse, be prepared for far more expenditure on fire preventative equipment in the next ten or more years (which may not be a bad thing) and, above all, join your local volunteer rural or residential fire service. If one is not in your area, lobby your Council for one to be formed and equipped.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell

West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

19 April, 1999

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

The Editor
«newspaper»

Dear Sir or Madam

Common sense will always make a mockery of idealism and its antithesis, pragmatism.. Show me a Government run by common sense and I will show you a miracle of selflessness.

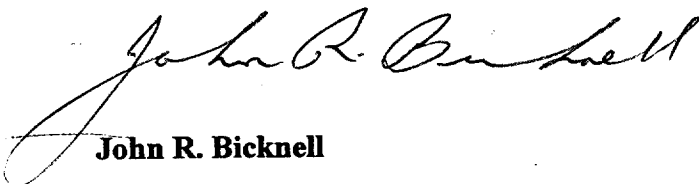
Personal ideals get in the way of good government. Those ideals may be shared by a group of people, which can make it all the more dangerous if legislated into government and enforced.

The enforcement of Cumberland Plain Woodland preservation and propagation up to back doors, along fences, on farms and among mass residential areas by way of corridors, seems to be the ideal of some people, or is it simply to make money by attaching themselves to local councils as consultants after legislation has been passed?

It was the noted author, E.M. Forster, who observed that "positive ideals are becoming a curse, for they can seldom be achieved without someone being killed, or maimed, or interned".

Once again, plant trees intelligently. Enquire as to their volatility to fire before purchasing and planting.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell

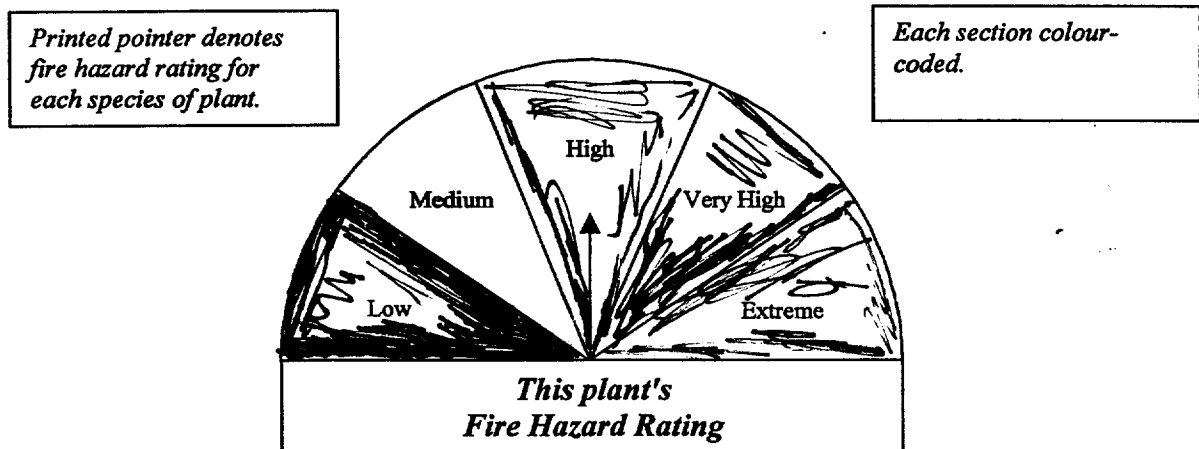
Orchard Industry Action Group
C/- West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

27 July 1999

The Facilitator
Readers Digest Environment Awards

PROJECT: FIRE HAZARD RATING OF INDIGENOUS PLANTS



Step 2(a)

The environmental benefits of advising people as to the volatility to fire of Australian native plants will be ongoing as people learn to plant native species of a Low to Medium fire hazard rating in close proximity to homes, buildings, fences, crops, etc. Those plants or trees which are of High, Very High and Extreme fire hazard rating could be planted away from fire sensitive areas, where they can be kept under control by hazard reduction measures, thus allowing for regeneration which is Nature's way in the Australian bush.

The legal problem of labelling a plant as "Fire Retardant", and subsequently the house burns down in a bush fire giving the owner of the house legal redress, would be averted, as the inference is that even if a plant is rated as having a low fire hazard rating, the hazard is still there, but of less concern.

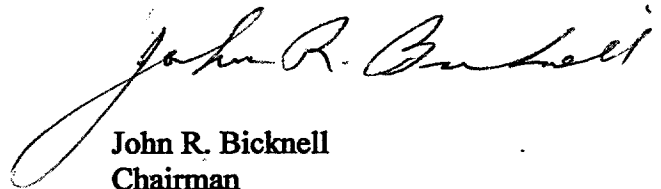
Promoting Australian native plants responsibly will enable more people to make the right decisions because settled, as distinct from nomadic, hunter-gatherer social structures do not allow for the regular burning off of the bush in close proximity to housing for safety and health reasons.

Step 2(b)

The award monies will be spent on promoting this project, as much networking needs to come to fruition with State Emergency Services and Bush Fire Brigade Headquarters, the relevant Ministers in the NSW State Government and with ticket manufacturers, including the Nursery Industry Association of NSW Ltd (NIAN).

A portion of the monies would probably need to be spent on a researcher gathering the relevant information on classifying indigenous plants as to their fire hazard ratings, most of which are already known. N.I.A.N. would be the first point of call, then convincing ticket manufacturers of the soundness of the proposal, possibly with the help of Government policy, or even legislation. All of this costs time and money.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Bicknell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

**John R. Bicknell
Chairman
Orchard Industry Action Group**

West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

14 January 2002

Peta Seaton M.P.
Member for Southern Highlands
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Peta

That which is being said in the media about the bushfire emergency by Bob Debus and Co. for the most part is quite true, however that which is not being said needs to be brought to public attention.

Some of us have seen these events many times before, yet they are soon forgotten, which works to the advantage of the "ultra-green" groups that have infiltrated our bureaucracy.

As has been explained before in previous correspondence "wildlife corridors" are a two-edged sword. On the one hand these corridors allow for the movement of wildlife; on the other they are open invitations to wildfire, whether deliberately lit or natural, such as by lightning.

The insistence of radical green groups in re-establishing large areas of highly explosive native vegetation, such as Cumberland Plain Woodland, in closer proximity to housing, farms, businesses etc, especially in wildlife corridors, should be resisted.

The planting of fire retardant or resistant species of vegetation, whether they be native or introduced species, would be a step forward, so long as it is kept in mind that these plants will eventually burn in a sustained fire situation. Hazard reduction during cool to cold months must still be carried out on a cyclical basis to ensure that the crowns of mature trees are not burnt and destroyed.

Many introduced species of plants are compatible with Australian native species of fauna, and in many cases are preferred over native flora.

The categorising of plants and/or plant communities as ranging from a low fire hazard rating to an extreme fire hazard rating should be phased in by legislation. This idea has been put forward before, yet was rejected as it was feared by the "ultra-green" groups that people would not buy native plants such as Cumberland Plain Woodland species, that had a high volatility to fire; better to keep people uninformed.

Americans will never be allowed to forget the events of 11 September 2001. The world will never be allowed to forget the Holocaust of 1939-1945. Will Australians be allowed to forget the lessons of the 2001-2002 bushfire emergency?

Recommendations

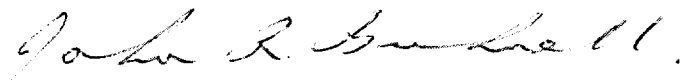
- 1) Reduce the interface of National Parks with private land.
- 2) Enforce a strict regime of hazard reduction in wildlife corridors in urban and rural zones.
- 3) Reassess the threat of litigation against Fire Brigades and personnel in order to ensure hazard reduction is carried out without fear of prosecution.
- 4) Rural Fire Brigades be given training in hazard reduction in National Parks in order to familiarise their members with the terrain and the access roads and fire trails, especially in water catchment areas.
- 5) Fire trails be re-established and maintained in order to allow regular patterned hazard reduction in National Parks and water catchment areas.
- 6) Encourage the use of rainwater tanks by households within 100 metres of bushland settings/corridors, whether urban or rural. This necessitates the relaxing of rules, regulations and ordinances adhered to by many Councils as to the storage of rainwater for domestic purposes.
- 7) That the influence of National Parks and Wildlife Service, Councils and related bureaucracies and lobby groups be reviewed in relation to private land and agricultural areas in regard to the establishment of "public good conservation" such as wildlife corridors and to hazard reduction.

Human interference by disaffected people in deliberately lighting fires will be an ongoing problem and will probably get worse in years to come as our population increases. No amount of education, threats of imprisonment or "rubbing their noses in the ashes" etc will stop this problem as it goes to the core of each person's personality. At that particular moment in time it is unforeseeable, even to the perpetrator.

It is therefore necessary to adjust the environment around us as best we can, even if it means the introduction of non-indigenous plants, and a strict adherence to hazard reduction measures.

In conclusion, the problems of flood rains after such a huge fire event will be evident in the turbidity of catchment drinking water, along with giardia and cryptosporidium, not to mention the thousands of tonnes of soil, dead bodies and charred material washed into catchment dams.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell

West Wind Orchard
145 Fergusson Road
LAKESLAND NSW 2572

Telephone: 02 4680 9277

1st February 2002

The Honorable Bob Debus
Minister for the Environment
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

Those of us who have read the book or seen the film "The Crucible" wonder at the extreme stupidity of those who followed the fundamentalist line in Salem. So many people's lives were sacrificed, or scarred, for what?

The "fundamentalist environmental movement" in Australia is in danger of overstepping that line of sanity (if it hasn't already).

Many Councils, at the direction of the State Government, have instituted rules, regulations and ordinances which make it extremely difficult for a landholder to obtain a licence to carry out hazard reduction in order to protect their property from wildfires.

The fear of being prosecuted if hazard reduction is carried out by individual property owners, or fire brigades, and of that fire encroaching on someone else's property with the threat of litigation and heavy fines, has in the past eight years or so led to heavy fuel loads of highly combustible material accumulating on the ground in extremely vulnerable areas.

Some of us have carried out regular hazard reduction for many years, which is evident in the good environmental health of those areas under our control, yet when we have carried out hazard reduction (albeit surreptitiously over the past eight years) we feel guilty, even though we know that what we are doing is necessary and must be done, even though we could be punished and fined if found out.

People could be forgiven for thinking that Australia was indeed "Terra Nullius" in an environmental sense, as the fundamentalist environmentalists are adamant that there should be no human interference, ie hazard reduction, anywhere in order to bring Australia back to a "pristine" pre-white settlement condition - thus the "wilderness" syndrome whereby no human interference is allowed in areas such as Warragamba catchment and wildlife corridors criss-crossing rural and urban areas.

The undeniable fact that aborigines had constantly over millennia burnt off excess fuel on the ground seems not to register with extremists.

Perhaps it is time to re-educate the environmental educators and theorists in our universities whose pupils are now ensconced in our bureaucracies where the "crucible" is "manufactured" and its laws enforced by State Government and Local Councils, to the detriment of our society.

Yours sincerely



John R. Bicknell



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

PETA SEATON, M.P.

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

SHADOW MINISTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT

ASSISTANT TO THE LEADER OF THE
OPPOSITION ON WOMEN



19 March 2002

The Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Bushfires
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

Dear Secretary

I have enclosed a submission from Mr John R Bicknell of "West Wind" Orchard, 145 Fergusson Road, Lakesland 2572 for consideration by the Joint Select Committee.

I would be grateful if you would register this submission, and ensure all Committee Members are made aware of it and the content of the submission be considered in detail.

Yours sincerely

Peta Seaton MP
Member for Southern Highlands
Shadow Minister for Competition and
Consumer Protection
Shadow Minister for Small Business
Shadow Minister for Insurance Regulation
ps/ls

enc