

THE YARNER

The official newsletter of the **MCAV**

What's inside:

- Roger Underwood's Quadrant article
- A look at the history of the Upper Jamieson Hut
- Photos from the MCAV AGM
- A poem from Billy Ruth Poetry
- Notes on how a board meeting works

A word from our President

It has been a bit of an extended period since our last Yarnier, but we are back and ready for a fantastic 2022!

So much has happened the last few months its hard to wrap it all up in a single column.

Firstly, we held our first ever overnight MCAV AGM and it was a fantastic weekend out. Ross and Magda Brown kindly lent us their amazing space which not only included green grass, towering hilltops but also a creek! Could not have had a better setting, and to then have Scotty, Dowsy, Rowley and the boys all pitch in and do the set up for us was an incredible effort and one we very much appreciate.



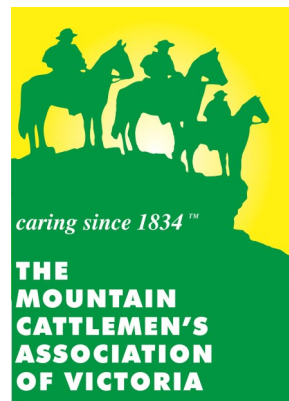
We have already set a date for next years overnight AGM – it will be held in Omeo on November 26. The plan is to hold the AGM in an area “opposite” to that of the G2G, so that members from both sides of the hill can attend at least one MCAV event.

Officially, not a lot changed during the MCAV AGM meeting. I was very humbled to have again been nominated president, and Ben Treasure also accepted his re-nomination for Vice. The Board remained pretty much the same as 2021, which is a fantastic result as we have a great team of people behind us.

A couple of things that were raised – and there will be more news on this in the pages of this Yarnier – but we want to increase the involvement of our members. The MCAV needs interested people to step up and be involved. Does this sound like you? Do you have an interest in history, in brumbies, in policy or in events? Perhaps you are a handy video editor or a great photographer. Please contact the office if you would like to be more involved from an organizational point of view.

A couple of weekends after the AGM we also took our cattle to their summer grazing run.

Firstly, though It seems like so long ago, my family and I once again took our cattle up to the King River at the start



Our 2022 MCAV Board

President: Bruce McCormack

Vice President: Ben Treasure

Secretary: Ken Heywood

Treasurer: John Andrews

Past President: Graeme Stoney

Special Projects: Chris Commins

G2G Coordinator: Cass McCormack

Associate Rep: Chris Lewis

North East Delegates: Lyric Anderson, Phil Ryder, Bruce Treasure (emergency)

Mansfield Delegates: Jack McCormack, Dave Stoney

Gippsland Delegates: Rose Faithfull, Chris Hodge, Nook Coleman (emergency), Ross Brown (emergency)

Omeo Delegates: Simon Turner, Edward Fitzgerald, Joe Connley

Dates for
the Diary:

Important Dates:

February 21: Board Meeting @ Myrtleford

May 20: Board Meeting at Maffra

September 17: Board Meeting at Merrijig

October 7—9: Merrijig Get Together @ McCormack Park

November 26—27: MCAV AGM @ Omeo

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A note about MCAV Board meetings

The more people, the better—that is the way we feel about MCAV Board meetings.

The meetings are not only a chance to hear about what's happening in an official capacity, but it's also a great way to put faces to names and catch up with those who live on the other side of the hill.

We have tried to spread out our meeting dates and locations to encourage visitors from all across the MCAV grazing regions.

For those of you who have not been before, it is important to note a few things.

Agendas will be sent out prior to meetings, but please let us know a week out if you are able to attend so that we can let the venue cater appropriately.

Only Board members are able to vote during a meeting, but that does not mean we aren't listening. We have the Board Associate Member position (held by Chris Lewis) which was created so that members have a 'voting voice'. Chris is more than happy to discuss anything you would like him to raise. Shoot an email to secretary@mcav.com.au and Chris will then be able to discuss issues during meetings.

We are also adding time for general discussion during each Board Meeting, where we will invite all those present to take the floor. This way, you can let us know any issues, things you want followed up etc.

For items that require Board investigation or something that needs to be signed off, you are welcome to again email the office and we can add the topic into our agenda.

Most importantly, we want your feedback—both at our meetings and at any other times during the year. We need to know what our members want so that we can remain a strong group focused on the right issues.

of Summer. It's a tradition we have undertaken for more than 150 years, and to this day is a practice we hold onto very tightly.

Many of you may know I run a trail ride business as well as the farm, so it will come as no surprise to learn that we field hundreds of emails each year from people wanting to come along on our cattle muster.

What may surprise you, though, is to learn that this is one weekend we do not open up to the public. Normally I am all for showing off our backyard – letting people discover the magic of the High Country from the seat of a saddle – but this tradition we reserve for family. It would be easy to turn it into a profit-making weekend, and the saddles would sell out years in advance I have no doubt. But we aren't interested in making a dollar from this tradition. It is a weekend we reserve for us; it's me and my sister, my son, my daughters, my grandkids.

My nieces and nephews come along, a cousin, an aunt. The faces vary each year, but the love does not waver. We are there to connect to the bush and to re-connect with each other. To tell the Melbourne family members that they won't get reception on the mobile, and that a chat around the campfire is entertainment enough.

It's a weekend for riding and driving, for slow trails beside the river and helping a new calf find its mum in the mob.

It's a tradition that I wouldn't swap for all the tea in China, and much like some families celebrate Christmas Eve or New Years Day, we celebrate our "cattle out the bush" weekend.

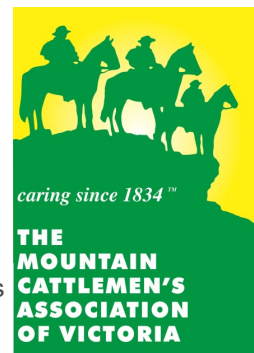
Having said all of that, I also DO want to show off not only our backyard, but also our tradition and livelihood. That's why we do run cattle salting trips each year, where we invite the public to come along and experience that high country muster we all dream of.

Separate to all of that, we have also celebrated Christmas, New Years and I did plenty of catching up with family and friends for the first time in ages.

Things have started to settle down a bit now, and I'm really looking forward to a fantastic year. Our Get Together is still months away, but we are already busy planning as it's going to be the 40th anniversary of the Man From Snowy River and we want to make it extra special!

So mark out the two big weekends we have planned for 2022—October 7—9 for the Get Together, and November 26—27 for the AGM. I hope to see you all there as we celebrate a return to normal life :)

Catch you round the
campfire — *Bruce*



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Get involved with the MCAV

At the recent MCAV AGM it was agreed by all that members from all locations, age groups and interests need to have a louder voice in the running of the MCAV—we can't represent you if we don't know how you feel!

We are looking for interested Associate members to become 'representative's' for their branch. There are four branches—Mansfield, North East, Gippsland and Omeo. The reps will report back to Chris Lewis, who has a position on the Board and is the Associate "voice".

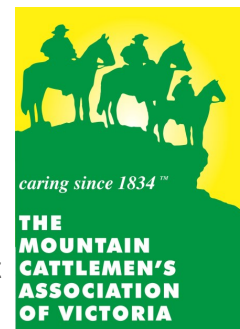
While the role itself is voluntary, it is none the less very important—we need to know what our priorities should be. Is it returning cattle to the High Country, increasing fuel reduction burns, advocating for the return of responsible timber harvesting or going all out on the brumby issue.

Perhaps you think we need to focus more on celebrating our history—on documenting the stories of old before they are lost to time.

These are the kind of questions we need answered.

We are also looking for those who might not want to report to the Board, but who are happy to be involved in a technical capacity. We have a number of projects on the go and are looking for help in the areas of: heritage and history, filming/editing and policy/by laws.

If any of the above is of interest to you please reach out to Rhyl via email and she can pass your details on—secretary@mcaav.com.au



Gippsland Red Meat Conference

The Gippsland Red Meat Conference replaces the East Gippsland Beef Conference and will be organised and delivered by Gippsland Agricultural Group (GAGG) with the support of Agriculture Victoria. The conference program will include topics on farm business recovery and resilience, red meat industry market outlook, labour saving technologies and hands-on demonstrations.

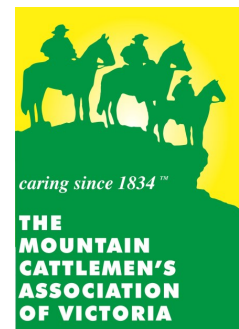
When: Tuesday 15 February: Where: Riviera Convention Centre, Bairnsdale; Time: 7.30 am – 6 pm, with dinner. For further information please contact Craig Bush on 0427 943 155 or email or check out the program on the GAGG website.

BACK IN STOCK

Our hoodies, softshell vests, jackets and kids t-shirts have all been re-stocked



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Lets talk about ... the Upper Jamieson Hut

Situated on a peaceful remote flat beside the Jamieson River is the Upper Jamieson Hut, originally built by Fred Fry in the 1930s for his Forestry Patrol.

Fred was an excellent bushman and craftsman. In his own recognisable style he erected many huts in the region using hand split timber "drop slab" construction, and his classic method of rolling the heavy roof poles into place over the centre ridge using a horse and a long chain.

Upper Jamieson Hut was one of the first huts Fred constructed in about 1938-1940, followed by the well-known and popular Frys Hut on the Howqua River in about 1943-44, both while working for the Forest Commission.

Fred also helped build many private fishing huts in the Howqua valley including Ashwin's, Gardner's, Ritchie's, Pickering's and Helen Schusters' at Howqua Hills. (The Howqua Hills Story by Chris Stoney p.32-35).

The hut was also occupied for some time by Jim Ware, whose father John Ware had grazed cattle on the Upper Jamieson in the early 1900s. In the early 1960s, when the Forests Commission was preparing to log the Upper Jamieson area for woollybutt and white gum, Jim Ware was employed to re-open bridle tracks in the area. He camped at the Upper Jamieson hut during this period, as did the parties of timber assessors. {Stoney 1993}

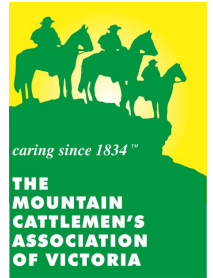
In 1991, after fire damage, the hut had some repairs performed by A. Mason and a DCNR worker. A verandah was also added.

By the early 2000's, Jamieson hut had become very run down. In 2008 extensive repair and preservation work was carried out by DEPI (now DELWP) contractors with contribution by Victorian High Country Huts Association and volunteers (VHCHA).

The above information was taken from the VHCHA Facebook page.

The VHCHA was funded after the major bushfires of February 2003 to try and preserve those huts left standing. The Association's goal is to be a "voice" for the huts – to pull together the various individuals and groups with an interest in huts, to lobby government, raise funds and coordinate volunteer efforts. The group relies entirely on its volunteers and are always looking for people to help out— contact secretary @hutsvictoria.org.au to get involved





MCAV SNAPSHOTS:

Thanks to the fabulous Kayla Jennison for her MCAV AGM shots—you can check out her work

www.instagram.com/k.jphotography/



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THE HIGH PLAINS By billy ruth poetry ©

I guess the early mobs were hereford
that grazed up on the high plains
McCormacks, Lovicks and Hearn's
some of the north east country names.

A land of adventure and hidden danger
with an abundance of summer feed,
when growing beef to sell to miners
it's what the mountain cattlemen need.

Hard country in the eighteen hundreds
the type of country that bred hard men
and the high country made good bushmen
because it was life or death back then.

A partnership between man and horse
and a thirst for adventure in their heart
it's that attitude of never give up
which set the mountain cattleman apart.

From the snowies across to Gippsland
cattle fattened on the summer graze
it became a way of life for generations
and it set the standard for future ways.

I've always been a passionate bushman
a staunch supporter of the cattlemen
and when those in power passed the bill
well it was a real sad day back then.

*A note from Billy: this is a new poem paying
tribute to all the men and women who made
the high country what it is today, all those high
country families who headed into that bush
facing all kinds of challenges and stuck it out.
Even though I only mentioned a couple of
family names it's too hard to mention them all,
but the thoughts are definitely there.*

Gippsland farm grants available

Are you a farmer living in the East Gippsland or the Wellington local government areas seeking to be better prepared for drought? If so, you may be eligible to apply for an On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate.

The \$1.9 million scheme, co-funded by the Commonwealth and Victorian Government, is providing eligible farm businesses a one-off 25 per cent rebate up to \$25,000 (GST exclusive).

Rebates can be used to purchase, deliver and/or professionally install water infrastructure for grazing livestock and permanent horticultural plantings that make your farm business more resilient to drought.

The scheme is open – so apply today

For full details visit the [Rural Finance website](#).

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR PHOTOGRAPHY WINNERS

Winners were: Bec Kirk-Bunch, Rhonda Vile,
Bonnie Stephenson, Charlotte Campbell, Kayla
Jennison & Harry Ferguson

Time lapse video shows rapid fuel re-growth

Following the 19-20 bushfires, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service installed seven time lapse videos across the state to capture a year's growth in the bush environment.

The images are supposed to highlight the resilience of the Australian landscape following bushfire—which it does, highlighting just how dangerous and rapid the growth of weeds and invasive species were in such a short time frame.

With another two years now gone by—including some of the wettest months in 2021—we shudder to think what these time lapse videos would now capture.

Cameras were installed across the state but of particular interest were the ones on the high plains of Kosciuszko National Park. Let us know your thoughts on the images—view the timelapse from all seven sites at https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/about-npws/fire-recovery-2020/bushfire-recovery-timelapse?fbclid=IwAR19ErE-HgomtKhgeFm3RdyRyNdf_oPAe-YObSMwA89WuRj2yOCKaw4WRwg

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The utter failure of yet another bushfire panel

By Roger Underwood

Note to our readers: this article was first published at www.quadrant.org.au a little while ago now, but, as with all of Roger's opinion pieces, it is a well thought out, reasoned and logical look at the reality of fires in our landscape.

When Prime Minister Morrison announced that there would be a Royal Commission into the 2020 bushfires in NSW and Victoria, my first reaction was 'It's not needed'. People who know about bushfires already knew precisely what caused the disaster and what needs to be done to ensure it does not happen again.

However, I did see some value in allowing people in affected communities to get things off their chests, and I thought it might be a timely opportunity for experts in bushfire science and operations to make a few points and to highlight the lamentable deficiencies in NSW and Victorian bushfire management.

Finally, I thought (naively), here is a chance for the Commissioners to study and summarise the many excellent reviews and inquiry recommendations arising out of bushfire disasters in Australia over the last 15 years or so.

Then I saw the Commission's Terms of Reference. My heart dropped to my boots. These were clearly designed to provide the PM and the state bushfire jurisdictions with a way of escaping accountability. The focus would be on process, not outcomes, on administration, not operations, on response, not mitigation. Then, even though it was already down in my boots, my heart dropped even further when I saw the make-up of the three-person commission. It was the worst possible combination. A retired Air Force officer, a green academic and a lawyer. Not one of them had an iota of personal experience in bushfire science, history, prevention, control or administration.

I tried to remain optimistic. I read submissions to the commission from respected bushfire specialists and was impressed; they were sensible, practical and focused on a better future. The Commission had placed before it an encyclopaedia of bushfire wisdom, and the fruits of hundreds of years of hard-won experience. My colleagues and I had worked for several weeks on the Bushfire Front's submission, and we were proud of it. It was based on the realities of bushfire occurrence in Australia, an intimate understanding of bushfire history, on the facts of bushfire science, and on hands-on practical experience. We demonstrated what worked and why it worked and why failed approaches failed. We provided a detailed blueprint for effective bushfire management in Australia.

"The commission will read all this, and be guided by it," I thought.

I was also convinced that the commission would call as witnesses the cream of bushfire scientists and bushfire managers in Australia to help them analyse, debate and decide on the best way ahead. People with international reputations like Phil Cheney, David Packham, Neil Burrows, Tony Bartlett and Rick Sneeuwjagt. Although it worried me that the Commission was not assisted by anyone with dinkum bushfire nous, I still imagined they would be smart enough to avail themselves of Australia's world-class bushfire talent.

I was wrong about all of this.

Firstly, the commission did not review or draw upon the wisdom or conclusions of any of the recent bushfire inquiries, not even the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday bushfires. Instead they looked only at reports up to and including the infamous 2004 COAG report, without question the most





amateurish and damaging bushfire enquiry in Australian history. This report, fashioned by academics without bushfire experience, advocated that instead of preparing for bushfires with sensible programs like fuel-reduction burning, the focus should be on evacuation of threatened communities *after fires started*, and then on sorting out the post-fire mess. Actually, the COAG inquiry's failure to promote fuel reduction should have surprised nobody. It was chaired by Wollongong University's Professor Rob Whelan, who had recently published a paper titled "[Don't fight fire with fire](#)". When bushfire people around Australia get together, we laugh (mirthlessly) about this.

Nor did the Commission seem to take any notice of submissions from reputable bushfire scientists and managers. There was no indication anywhere in their report that indicated they had read these submissions, nor (in our case) did they approach us with any questions about our analyses and proposals. My colleague Tony Bartlett, a hero of the Ash Wednesday and Canberra bushfires, made a brilliant submission. The response? According to Tony:

When I read the Royal Commission report not one of the issues that I raised or my suggested recommendations were covered in any way It is very frustrating as vocal academics (most of whom have never even been to a bushfire) got their views recognised. I find it immensely frustrating that the Royal Commission report failed to provide any proper analysis of the nature of the issues raised in my submission and then just ignored the submissions that presented alternative views to those of academia and the emergency service chiefs.

The explanation for this became apparent when it was let slip by a Commission staffer that submissions from "lay people" would not be treated as seriously as those from people within the emergency services. Our combined hundreds of years practical experience in bushfire science, research and operations counted for nothing: we were 'lay people'!

It is not that our Bushfire Front position on bushfire management has not been rejected in the past. It was rejected for years by Western Australian ministers and senior bureaucrats before the penny finally dropped (there is now a very professional approach to bushfire management in WA). We were used to rejection. But this was the first time we had been ignored.

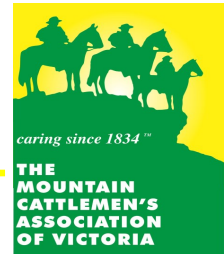
The final insult was the failure by the Commission to invite the cream of Australia's bushfire aristocracy to give evidence and to provide them with insights into bushfire history, alternative views and intelligent analysis. It is true that the highly respected ACT bushfire specialist Neil Cooper was interviewed, but he was a lone voice. Instead of speaking to bushfire experts, they talked to "fire chiefs", environmentalists with bees in their bonnets about climate change, or to university ecologists with no stake in bushfire outcomes, no skin in the game, no responsibilities for land or bushfire-hazard management.

So, by the time the Commission's report was released, my optimism had faded. I remembered a management seminar I had attended many years ago, where the guru pointed out the dangers of project failure when the focus was on process rather than outcomes, and I heaved a sigh. This Royal Commission would have provided him with a case study on what happens when the process was mismanaged and the outcomes were lamentable.

In fact, the Commission's report is worse than I expected. Yes, they did tidy up some administra-



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tive matters, mostly concerning jurisdictions and the need for uniformity over warnings. These were hardly things that needed a Royal Commission; competent public servants could have sorted them out in a half-day meeting. The role of the ADF has now been clarified, but you would have thought the PM and the Minister for Defence might have come to this obvious conclusion after 10 minutes' discussion.

Sadly, the commissioners bought right into the climate-change-causes-bushfires equation. This idea has been comprehensively demolished, including a [hallmark paper](#) (and [more besides](#)) in [Quadrant](#) that eventually became a submission to the Royal Commission — but which was also ignored. The commissioners appeared completely blind to the fact that the “climate-change-causes-bushfires” position is not just flawed in terms of logic, science and history, it offers no solution to the current bushfire threat. What is blatantly obvious is that the climate alarmist lobby is using the bushfires to promote a political agenda. And the Commission fell for it.

Secondly the Commission was sucked into the trap of thinking that more and bigger water bombers — indeed, a *national fleet* of water bombers, a veritable air force of water bombers, will be the answer to the bushfire maiden's prayer. They overlook the fact that the existing water bomber fleet was of little value in the 2020 bushfires. Even in California, a focus on water bombing has even been condemned as a waste of money and effort.



The climate-change-causes-bushfires argument and the call for a water bombing Air Force are clearly linked. Nobody really knows how the Australian climate can be “fixed” so as to prevent bushfires, so a fall-back plan is needed: attack the flames with a strategy similar to that of the RAF's Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris’ in World War II. It won't work, but the media will love it.

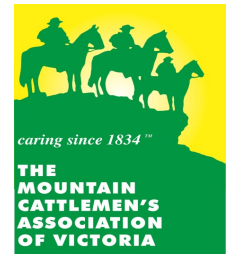
Anyone with the merest understanding of bushfire history and science already knew what the main “causes” of the 2020 bushfire disasters in NSW and Victoria were.

There was a drought, meaning fuels were super-dry; # there were long-unburnt, heavy fuels, meaning that any fire would quickly become so intense that control would be difficult; # there were many simultaneous outbreaks, meaning that the firefighters were inevitably overwhelmed; # fire-fighting strategies were frequently incomprehensible; and # most of the communities in fire-prone areas were horribly ill-prepared.

Once the fires got going, there were other factors that made things worse, or more confused, such as the lack of coordination across state borders and the attempted evacuation of whole towns, the residents of which were totally unprepared, and the evacuation routes uncertain. We also observed that emergency services and national parks agencies these days will often “watch and wait”, rather than pounce aggressively on a fire when it is small. And there seems to be a reluctance to fight fires at night when, traditionally, control is easiest. Reading about a fire in a national park that was left untended for *three weeks* before control was attempted left me speechless with disbelief.

It is also clear that NSW and Victorian fire and land management authorities these days lack the expertise and experience to carry out large-scale indirect fire suppression operations — that is, strategic backburning to create effective fire breaks in the face of a running fire. Backburning is often the only effective strategy, but in long-unburnt bushland it is dangerous and can easily go wrong if conducted by people who don't have the necessary experience and know-how, or the right sort of resources, to ensure the flames do not get away. Attempting backburning under extreme conditions and without very skilled and experienced firefighters in control is a recipe for calamity.

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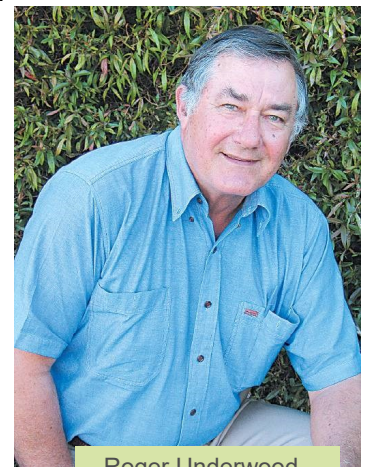


But put these operational issues aside. The fact is that once there was the deadly combination of drought, heavy fuels, many fires and vulnerable communities, the disaster was ordained. This has nothing to do with climate change; it is the inevitable consequence of foolish policies, incompetent governance and unprofessional land management.

The Royal Commission grasped none of this. Their recommendations suggest that they were unable to cut to the essence of the bushfire situation in Australia. This essence is that **(i)** there will always be droughts, they are not “unprecedented”; **(ii)** Australian bushland accumulates bushfire fuels, and once the weight of fuel reaches a certain (and well-understood) level, fires on even relatively mild days are uncontrollable; **(iii)** no matter how many firefighters or water bombers you have, the fire will always win if it allowed to expand sufficiently in size and intensity before being attacked; **(iv)** under extreme conditions, it is normal to get many simultaneous fires, always overwhelming firefighting resources; and **(v)** the control of high-intensity forest fires requires people with a unique set of qualities, including a sound understanding of bushfire science, extensive forest firefighting experience, intimate local knowledge and access to sufficient numbers of heavy machinery, especially bulldozers, capable of night-time operations.

It also helps if access roads and fire trails have been properly maintained. Increasingly, in Victoria and NSW, these people, these policies and these resources are no longer available, so firefighting falls back on water bombers, and volunteer brigades who (however brave and dedicated) are asked to do the impossible.

Then there is the suggestion of creating a national firefighting force that will head off to any part of Australia and take over fire suppression from the locals. The idea of firefighters in the karri forest of south-west WA, flown in from Canberra and under the direction of “fire chiefs” in Canberra, is terrifying, and would be laughable if it was not being seriously suggested.



Roger Underwood

I am staggered that the Commission failed to put up in lights on its front cover: Bushfire management in Australia *must be based* on preparedness and damage mitigation. Yes, we still need experienced, well-trained firefighters, and we still can make strategic use of aircraft, but by themselves, without the potential firegrounds and threatened communities having been responsibly prepared, the firefighters and the water bombers will be helpless when most needed.

What is already known about bushfires in Australia and needed no Royal Commission to elucidate? We *know* that at the end of a drought, fuels will be dead dry; we *know* that extreme fire weather occurs almost every summer; we *know* that fires are always going to start; we *know* that if fuels are kept at a low level, fires will be milder and more easily, cheaply and safely controlled, and we *know* that if rural and peri-urban communities are properly prepared in the expectation of fire on a bad day, they will escape without loss of life and minimal damage.

None of this is new or earth-shattering. What is earth-shattering is that the Royal Commission seemed to miss it completely, or deliberately to ignore it in the pursuit of other agendas.

In allowing itself to be sucked into the climate-change-causes-bushfires position, and in promoting the Bomber Harris solution, and in failing to come out powerfully on the need for state jurisdictions to invest responsibly in a preparedness and mitigation strategy, based on fuel reduction, the 2020 Royal Commission will have (if implemented) set back the clock on bushfire management by about 30 years. It has been a waste of time, money and the energy of good people, and will ensure only one thing: if the PM and the States buy it, identical bushfire disasters are inevitable.

Roger Underwood is a former General Manager of CALM in Western Australia, a regional and district manager, a research manager and bushfire specialist. Roger currently directs a consultancy practice with a focus on bushfire management. He lives in Perth, Western Australia.

This article was first published in The Quadrant online journal. We recommend taking a look at their website www.quadrant.org.au—it is a wealth of information and well thought out opinions.