

# SouthEastTIMBERassociation

## Bushfire Mitigation Lessons From the Past Almost Forgotten.

With a wet summer saving NSW from another disastrous bushfire season, it is time for NSW and other Australian bushfire and public land management agencies to reflect on what they can do to mitigate future bushfire risks in Australia.

Most of the recommendations from the various 2019-20 bushfire inquiries and the royal commission focussed on processes to minimise human casualties, more procedures to run bloated emergency response empires and undertaking more research to justify minimal mitigation work and protect the reputations of those who know not what they should do.

Some reflection on past learnings may be a good place to start, if we are to have more effective bushfire control in future decades. The bushfires of 1951-52, and 1953-54 in NSW highlighted the risk that uncontrolled bushfires burning in remote, inaccessible country during late spring and summer posed to towns, farms and cities on days of very high to extreme fire danger.

Following the serious fires in the Blue Mountains and other parts of the Coast and Tablelands during the 1957-58 fire season, the Chief Secretary, the Hon. Christopher Kelly, M.L.A., convened a special conference of the State's firefighting services and Local Government Authorities to examine in detail proposals for combating fire outbreaks in unoccupied crown lands contiguous to towns and settlements.

Broadly, the schemes were designed to include:

1. The prevention of uncontrolled fires;
2. The encouragement of controlled hazard reduction at safe times of the year;
3. The development of a system of fire trails and firebreaks in unoccupied lands.
4. The setting up of means of fire detection and communication; and
5. To facilitate attacks on fires in rough or inaccessible country at the earliest practicable stage.

Nine LOCALLY RUN Bushfire Prevention Schemes were established, with a budget for 1958-59 of 100,000 pounds (\$200,000). In the first 5 years of operation 5,310 km of fire trails were constructed for less than \$1 million. By 1970, the schemes had increased the length of fire trails to 8,046 km. In recent decades, with changes in public land tenure, parts of this network are no longer maintained, have been totally closed or access is heavily restricted.

Why does government spend \$255 million on aircraft hire in a bad bushfire season, yet spend \$8 to \$10 million a year mitigation works? A fraction is actually spent on the ground. More needs to be sent on the restoration of ground access to remote areas and undertaking adequate, about 8 percent of the gross forest area, on fuel reduction/ecological burning.

