

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Subcommittee

Inquiry into fire season preparedness

Wodonga — 20 July 2016

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair

Mr Daniel Young

Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

Participating Members

Mr Greg Barber

Mr Adem Somyurek

Mr Simon Ramsay

Staff

Acting secretary: Mr Richard Willis

Research assistant: Ms Annemarie Burt

Witness

Mr Colin Coyle.

The CHAIR — Are there any other members of our community that — please, sir.

Mr COYLE — My name is Colin Coyle. I am a farmer in Wodonga West. My background is with CFA. I have been a member of the CFA for some 53 years — for 20 years of that I was the captain at Wodonga West, and for 14 years I was the group officer, up until 2 years ago. I lease a fair deal of the land that is Wodonga environmental land and also some of the regional parkland, and it disturbs me somewhat that there was very little mention — in the way of fuel management that grazing was not mentioned. To my observation grazing is virtually the only fuel management tool that is used on the WREN land, the environmental land, and the regional parkland.

Over the years we have had a great battle with the environmentalists in those organisations in relation to our ideology in relation to fuel management and their ideology in relation to the environmental aspect that they have on it. They have the view that the grass should be locked up in the springtime and allowed to grow tall and left over the summer period so that the seed falls and then regenerates in the autumn time, whereas we are of the mind that we do not want to create thousands of acres of country or hundreds of acres of country on the amphitheatre on the urban-rural interface standing high with grass over that summer period.

Over the last few years I think we have gained somewhat. Both of those organisations have somewhat conceded that a conservative continual stocking rate on those lands is a much more viable option in relation to fuel management. I might add that a fire we had in 2014 just on the hills to the west of Wodonga, virtually on the doorstep of Wodonga, was only contained there because that country had been grazed and with the great efforts of the CFA volunteers who managed to hold that fire there.

Just in relation to Mr Jack's comments about the damage that occurs along the fence lines of DSE land or DELWP land, as it is now — or Parks Victoria. My brother had a couple of thousand acres burnt in the Indigo Valley, much of it adjoining the forest. He had hell's own job with the department to be able to get some trees back and all the trees that burnt down over the fence and totally destroyed the fence. To be able to get some of that cleared back was a major obstacle, and he has had a lot of hassle to get that fence back so that it is not impacted by burnt trees falling over it again. Those are a couple of the issues that I wanted to bring to your attention.

Terry Darmody has just had to leave. He is the group officer who replaced me a couple of years ago. ARTC and V/Line occupy the rail corridor all the way from here to Melbourne — one on one side of the line and one on the other. Virtually no work do they do on that. Had that been denuded of fuel at this last Indigo fire, it may have been able to have been held at the Hume Freeway. As it was, it had metre-high grass on it, and when the fire struck that it only increased in intensity. It jumped the freeway and the rest is history: it burnt for another 20 kilometres and burnt 700 of my brother's sheep plus other people's sheep and cattle as well as hundreds of kilometres of fence and hay and all those other improvements that were lost. They do little in the way of — or nothing in recent years — reducing the fuel on that rail corridor.

The CHAIR — ARTC is?

Mr COYLE — Australian Rail Track Corporation and V/Line. Each of them occupy one side of the line — one on the north and one on the south side. Thank you for your time.

The CHAIR — I appreciate that very much. Are there any other contributions that people want to make in brief response or summation? If there are not, I will thank Hansard again and record my thanks again to the City of Wodonga for the fine venue.

Committee adjourned.