**No time for the Bushfire HQ boys to panic now Gladys and Dan**

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RFS (Rogers) says this morning on ABC TV (paraphrased): We are not able to get confinement on these fires before the weekend. All visitors must leave the area now. The fires will do what they will.

CFA (Warrington) endorses these sentiments this morning on ABC TV. In fact, they went a step further a few days ago. They asked **everybody** to leave East Gippsland, visitors and locals.

  28 Dec

Harry baker ‏ @Hazzabazzadazza Dec 28 Replying to @CFA\_Updates

Should everyone in this area leave today??

CFA Updates ‏Verified account @CFA\_Updates Dec 28

Hi Harry, if you live in the potential impact area you should leave today to friends and family who live outside of the area. ^TW

MelissaD ‏ @D\_Melissa2 Dec 28 Replying to @CFA\_Updates

@DarrenChesterMP this is a devastating loss of economic capital in Gippsland region, as well as potential catastrophic damage to homes, landscape and infrastructure. We will have to forfeit our paid accommodation, unsure how we will get home, please lobby Nationals to do more!

David McNeice ‏ @AustActuary Dec 29 Replying to @CFA\_Updates

Everyone in East Gippsland must leave? Everyone? What is the capacity of the roads to evacuate everyone today? Is it possible? What are the consequences of sending the whole population onto the roads?

CFA Updates ‏Verified account @CFA\_Updates Dec 29

Hi David, it's recommended that everyone in the potential fire impact area (as indicated in the above map) leaves to friends and family who live outside of the area. ^TW

These messages are alarmist and unhelpful. They fill trusting people with fear, panic and distress and others with distrust. Evacuation threatens house loss. Vacant undefended houses are a known cause of high house loss rate in a severe bushfire attack. When authorities order a person to evacuate knowing that the house will be destroyed, it is a form of negligence, but people don’t usually like to sue the government.

Make these fire authorities accountable - they planted the wind in a drought spring and are now forcing us and the environment and the local economies to reap the whirlwind in a drought summer, a scenario of panic and fear and destruction with no end in sight. Their decision in the first few days of every one of these fires was to let them run a bit further. These decisions are now bringing the trusting public to their knees. Make them apologise for screwing us and our beloved bush environment up.

Instead of following best practice forest fire suppression in a drought spring and stopping fires in forest when small, they let them grow. They watched them run for weeks or months and grow too large to be stopped, often adding fresh fire onto containment lines to try to stop them. They would put in containment lines but did not provide adequate resources to prevent repeated bushfire escapes. And now they have delivered a dangerous mess for us.

Politicians have given them enough rope and now they are hanging themselves and us. They have let too many fires grow too large at the worst time of the year.

**Premier Gladys,** pull rank on your HQ boys. Instead of giving them all the money they want, tell them to deliver what the people want – zero life loss and zero house loss and progressive eradication of this annual bushfire menace.

Today, tell them to deliver hope and solutions instead of threats of Armageddon.

For example

**Get them to make a map of each area showing the bushfire-protected areas, = areas where people know they are safe from bushfire harm.**

* Map the recently burnt areas. These are now fuel-free firebreaks. The flash fuel is gone. Contrary to popular myth, they will not burn again.
* Next, show the areas burnt in the last 2 – 3 years. They reduce flame height (= fire intensity) to manageable levels. Contrary to popular myth, they do not slow the bushfire down.
* Then, include the built-up areas and other low fuel or fuel-free areas.

Then we recall that no matter how large the fire is, flame behaviour on a given site depends on the bushfire fuel on that site. It and surrounds can be managed to make people and houses safe from heat. People have to self-protect against smoke and embers.

These mapped areas provide safety from bushfire flame **now** and also provide protection against ember attack. There is a bit more to it, but you will be amazed how much of each area is already bushfire-protected, and you might realise that a blanket plea to evacuate is not an acceptable solution, now or long term. You also might understand that bushfire is not a natural disaster. You can remove the bushfire menace in an area by removing its fuel. Do not let anyone blame Mother Nature for this preventable disaster. Be angry because it will cost the government millions of wasted dollars that could have been used for badly needed productive purposes.

Then prepare for the future. Tell the HQ boys you will now measure their performance meaningfully. Your goal is to make your HQ boys eliminate the bushfire menace, area by area.

First step - make all areas in your State bushfire-protected within 3 – 5 years.

Other steps follow…

Finally, a warning. The Gippsland fires will be more of a problem to NSW than Victoria in coming weeks because our mega fires tend to run to the north east.

**Premier Dan,** the policies of you and colleagues are delivering a burnt and blackened East Gippsland to the unsuspecting public, just like “Scar” and the hyenas did in the Lion King. Let’s hope East Gippsland is not a glimpse of the outcome for our other forest areas this year. This outcome is a predictable consequence of the labour-green lobby alliance since the days of Cain and Bracks. You have just been voted in, so apparently this is what you think people in Victoria want. Some people are afraid of “blackened and burnt” and I want you to consider an alternative approach.

Judge Stretton recommended in 1939 that the Forests Commission be independent so that another 1939 bushfire scenario would be prevented. The government finally approved it after overcoming opposition from the Lands Minister. We foresters then protected our 7 million ha of crown land from bushfires like hawks because of its commercial value and our liability for damages if fire escaped crown land. Our accumulated wisdom was to hit them hard, keep them small.

Forty years later, centralist Cain detested the independence of the Forests Commission. Even though it was fast becoming the golden goose for the government – a department that would soon pay its way and generate a profit for government - he smashed it and made it subservient to labour-green lobby policies. Your own current policies have recently banned forestry on crown land.

You now have a 7 million ha budget liability – chronically underfunded crown land that has no current commercial value to your cash strapped government and no one to care if it burns or not (even though there is a pocket of **$10 Billion** market-ready 1939 mountain ash just behind Healesville which is of great value to the people but will soon be “saved” in another National Park, as required by the green lobby).

The Royal Commission recommended 5% fuel reduction burning. DELWP tried, but the well-organised activists sent rent-a-crowd tree sitters to prevent burns. Bad publicity / keep it quiet. Your Ministers quietly agreed to no burns. Increased centralist regulations and weather also hampered targets. To avoid future bad publicity, your loyal bureaucrats and compliant researchers devised a different measure – a residual risk system that included area burnt by control burns **and by bushfires**. They also decreed that an area burnt in say Gippsland **magically** reduced residual risk across the whole state. Treasury has now adopted residual risk as a performance measure (KPI) for DELWP. The 500,000+ha burnt so far will be a technical feather in DELWP’s cap in its next annual report to Treasury because residual risk will plummet. Thus, Treasury gets its required performance target but will now have to fork out millions for suppression and compensation, etc. Maybe Treasury will realise they set the wrong KPI.

***Do you understand Premier Dan?*** Your policies provide no incentive for government to stop bushfires on crown land when small. We saw in NSW this spring what happens to people and houses when the fire service let fires run in the forest and grow too large to stop. But in Victoria, government policies are the culprits. Treasury funds a fire when it is declared a bushfire, and then funds them when they grow large and keeps funding them for weeks and months and then DELWP uses area burnt by bushfires to reduce its residual risk KPI. They basically use fire suppression money from Treasury to do proxy control burning. It is also a great source of overtime for paid fire fighters in the union. Maybe these policies should be amended to keep bushfires small in Victoria.

Trouble with this fantasyland world is that each week or so in summer, we get a severe-weather day or two, and these too-big-to-put-out-fires burn people and houses and destroy crops and businesses. It is not fantasyland for the people or our air or our drinking water or our beloved forest.

Finally, we are in a new and dangerous era. Forest fire suppression has reverted to colonial era damage outcomes in Victoria and NSW, but back then there were no mega millions spent on technology and helicopters. We now have high damage outcomes and high expenditures occurring together. It should be an inverse correlation. Fire agencies rely on two Plan A defences – suppression and evacuation. We use a fire danger scale – Fire Danger Index. Total Fire Ban Days kick in at FDI 50. The highest on the log-scale is designed to be 100. Suppression capability (for planning purposes) is reached at windy FDI 30. If suppression fails, they only have evacuation to call upon. Evacuation causes house loss. This is why I see an urgent need for a Plan B to cover FDI’s above windy 30, based on pre-season preparation of properties, towns and settlements – people power self-defence in a prepared environment. It relies on strategic application of valid bushfire behaviour, something suppression forces would benefit from. This will generate low expenditures and low damage outcomes.

Now think about this. Damage is logically expected on severe weather days like 30 December, when FDI exceeds 50 or so. Our planning is based on high fire danger. But the properties in East Gippsland were lost in low fire danger weather on 31 December when FDI was below 10.

So, by letting fires run and grow large, NSW and Victorian fire agencies have smashed the correlation between fire danger rating and damage potential.

Balance must now be restored, as Stretton’s reforms achieved after the 1940’s. They ensured ALL running fires were extinguished and they introduced the concept of Total Fire Ban days to prevent new fire initiation on severe weather days.

Back to here and now.

We are about to enter our two most severe weather months. I am very worried about what lies ahead.

I just hope we get 100mm of rain next week because these fires have been let grow and escape to be now beyond firefighter control and most towns have not been formally prepared to defend.

Summer downpours have happened before. I hope we get the same downpour each summer until fire agency policies are re-balanced. They will be needed to negate the “Scar” legacy.