



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## Media Release

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### Windsor agrees with Tuckey “No fuel – No fire”

“No fuel – No fire” comments made by the former Federal Minister for Forestry, Wilson Tuckey in relation to the ferocity of the Victorian Bushfires and the need for changes to land management practices have been supported by the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor, in a speech to the Parliament this week, said that even though he also supported the establishment of a Royal Commission into the fires so that Australia can learn from this bushfire tragedy, there have been many reports and inquiries in the past that have supplied the answers but Governments of all persuasions have ignored that advice.

“It seems that after each major bushfire event, an inquiry of some description takes place and recommendations made to try to prevent future events from occurring or at least reducing the destruction caused.

We can all be wise after the event however unless we choose to act on the wisdom discovered then we will continue to subject people and our environment to the ravages of events like Victoria has and is currently experiencing.

Wilson Tuckey is right when he says ‘No fuel, no fire’ and I agree with him,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Tuckey told the Parliament, ‘... the only controllable factor .... is fuel: the dead leaves, pieces of bark and grass that become the gas that feeds the 50m high flames that roar through the bush with the sound of jet engines.....

If the fuels exceed about eight tonnes a hectare, disastrous fires can and will occur.....

Every objective analysis of the dynamics of fuel and fire concludes that unless the fuels are maintained at near the levels that our indigenous stewards of the land achieved, then we will have unhealthy and unsafe forests that from time to time will generate disasters such as the one that erupted on Saturday.”

Mr Windsor in his speech to the Parliament also referred to a document that was put to the Victorian Parliament about five years ago, after the Gippsland fires occurred, by the Independent state member for Gippsland East, Craig Ingram, entitled ‘East Gippsland: burned at the political stake’.

Mr Windsor said, “Craig (Ingram) refers to the 1939 fires in Victoria, after which a royal commission was carried out. Some of the recommendations of that royal commission have only been put in place in the last 10 to 15 years. Some of those recommendations, which apply as much today as they did in 1939, have not been put in place—particularly those in relation to some land management practices and to the responsibility of neighbours

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to look after land that is adjacent to other people. With the continued trend of people wanting to live in the urban bush interface and with our great love of trees and nature, we really have to revisit some of these issues.

I am not suggesting people should not live there, but maybe in that interface area there should be a policy of prescribed burning. Some states—New South Wales, for instance—have almost retreated from that. It is seen as polluting the atmosphere if you protect land in that way in New South Wales.

I was on a bushfire inquiry committee when I was in the New South Wales state parliament about 10 or 12 years ago. A lot of these issues were raised then and really very little has occurred. We have gone through the Canberra fires. There were a whole range of issues raised there, and many of them have been brushed aside. That is not to suggest that this is the fault of government. I would be the last to say that, but I think the community really has to recognise that a wildfire will occur if you do nothing to stop it. And when it does occur on an occasion like that vicious day when the Canberra fires occurred—and there were similar conditions in Victoria the other day—those sorts of conditions will make it far worse, so that you cannot stop it. I think we have got to design policy that takes the basic premise that you will not stop it unless you have put in preventative practices sometime before.

The Victorians have done a little bit of homework on prescribed burning practices in recent years. The government there has, I am told, moved towards more prescribed burning than perhaps the previous government had. But it is still not enough. The rolling targets that were apparently to be put in place under the arrangements in Victoria have not been picked up for future years. By ‘rolling targets’ I mean that, if the target is 100,000 hectares of prescribed burning in a year to protect an area—a chequerboard burn, in imitation of what the Aboriginals did—and if the 100,000 hectares is not reached in a particular year because the conditions might not be there during the winter months to carry out the burn effectively, that should roll into the next year and the funding should roll as well. To my knowledge, that is not happening in a lot of the places where these massive wildfires occur.

I am sure Craig Ingram will put in a document to the royal commission. He does not blame anybody, but he makes the plea, I think, that communities really have to learn that, if you do nothing, these tragedies will occur again and again. As I said, I remember 10 or 15 years ago when I was in the state parliament and we carried out an inquiry into bushfires. ....The Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, for instance, have highly destructive fuel loads sitting there, and nothing is really being done to prevent a similar circumstance. It will happen. It has to happen, because that is the natural way. If you do not have a chequerboard-burning landscape control policy and you allow these very large fuel loads to build up, it is just a mathematical calculation—tonnes per hectare times temperature times humidity times a few other things plus some wind and the correct circumstances and then you get what we saw in Canberra, what we saw on Ash Wednesday, what we saw in Tasmania some years back and what we have seen again recently. Those tragic circumstances will repeat themselves. In terms of the urban bush interface, we really have to start not to learn—because most of the documentation has been put in place before—but actually apply some of the solutions that have been identified, some as far back as 1939.”