

ISSUE 2318

"In Support of Progress" Newsletter

27 September 2023

Fire
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It is almost October – warm days are becoming the order of the day. Days will soon be much warmer, and the ground much drier. We are confronting one of those seasons, where fire becomes the ever-present threat.

FIRE

This is the word on much of our minds at the moment. The topic is receiving good coverage in the daily media - In fact daily coverage - and this is a good thing.

We were confronted with a stark reminder of the danger of fire recently, strong gale-force winds and on the East Coast the Coles Bay blaze, which came from nowhere, travelled fast, and cut off the only exit road. Many of us live in a similar environment, close to flammable vegetation and only one exit road. What if that happened to us?

ARE WE READY?

Let's consider what we can do. Some basic stuff. Before any fire occurs, we can clean our gutters and remove flammable material from the ground around us, Fire produces embers which can run ahead of the fire, and embers can set roofs and gardens alight prior to the arrival of the fire front.

If a fire comes at us, it will come quickly, and it will be ferocious. We will have very little time to consider whether to stay or whether to go. So, some things to consider now, while we have the luxury of time.

STAY OR GO?

If you were to stay, you may well be without help or backup. You may also be without power or water. You may save your property, but chances are the fire will win, and it could take you as well!

All advice from the authorities is "Be ready to go - and be ready to go **early**". Know where to go – where is a safe place near you? Often it is a Local Council facility. What road to take, and what options are there if that road is closed?

WHAT TO TAKE?

What about animals? The fire won't wait while you get organized – you need to be organised now, and I mean NOW – emergency supplies (water, food, medicines), family requirements, animal needs, any records or gear you may wish to take with you. Pre-packed is best! Get an emergency pack ready NOW.

I recently attended a community forum sponsored by the four Greater Hobart Councils and these points were being hammered home to all attendees, many of whom were elderly. The elderly can be slow to react in a crisis situation, so the message "Be Ready to Leave" is especially pertinent.

What also became apparent is that while encouraging individuals to be prepared, Councils themselves are not so proactive. In many cases regulations prohibit people from being fire-ready, with restrictions in place regarding burn-offs, tree removal, collection of green waste and development of safety zones.

Comments from Council officers such as "We are looking into it", "We sympathise with your issue" and "You should speak to someone about that" permeated the conversation. They could do so much better than that. And must.

And finally for this segment, fuel reduction burning is a burning issue, and hopefully is being done in a co-ordinated way. The bush needs to be managed properly for fire. Claims that native forest should be left alone expose a ridiculous misunderstanding of what is necessary to actually save it from devastation. One lightning strike is all it takes to start a fire. A heavy fuel load will soon have it out of control. AS such, co-ordination between the various State authorities, such as the TFS, STT, the Police, and Parks is essential, together with Councils, water and power authorities.

It is really serious stuff - Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Accountability

The new CEO of QANTAS has begun her career apologizing to the general public for the behaviour of the company over the last few years. Not an auspicious start to one's term as a CEO. However, her apologies reflect the fact that seriously wrong things were done by the company, and that reflects on the Board, which by design or neglect allowed these things to happen.

The former CEO is a convenient scapegoat, but he did not operate in isolation. It was the Board that let the former CEO do such things, and paid him handsomely to do it. Thus the buck stops with them. Apologies and saying sorry is one thing, but no way is that enough. No question, the Chairman must accept responsibility and must stand down. He may not wish to, but stand down he must. For the good of the company and also for his own integrity. To do otherwise says a lot about the culture of the place, a culture which he nurtured, and will require more drastic action to ensure he departs.

The new CEO will earn every penny she is being paid to get the company back in the public's esteem.

While on the topic of accountability, the Commission of Inquiry (into the Tasmanian Government's response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings) has now reported and in its report has pointed the finger at two State institutions, being the Launceston General Hospital (LGH) and the Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

There has been significant and horrific exposure of the failures in both establishments. However, while individuals have been named in the LGH, there seems to have been little in the way of who did what at Ashley. Who was in charge?

Ashley would be a fractious environment to work in – certainly no bed of roses - but that does not excuse the heinous behaviour of those in charge there? So, government, where specifically lies the responsibility and the accountability? It cannot be left to drift.

The Voice

With a fortnight to go, the debate has descended into a marketing competition between two sides. Slogans have taken over from debate, YES says "Right the Wrongs", while NO says "One united, not two divided". etc etc

As the debate has heated up, so has the language and the abuse with people on each side condemning and denigrating the other. Confusion, dissembling and doubt have become the order of the day, with activists taking the running.

I guess it was inevitable that it would come to this, sad as it may be, but such is life,

Stepping away from the viciousness and name-calling, both sides do have a legitimate case to present, and neither is absolutely right or wrong. At the end of the day, it will be a judgement call by each of us as to which way to cast our vote. Which will win – emotion or logic, hope or fear, heart or head?

Personally, I am persuaded by Noel Person's call "Give us the authority and we will shoulder the responsibility." Sure, power can be abused, and sure, some will endeavour to use power for their own ends, but it is a matter of balance. Somewhere in this debate there has been a genuine cry for acceptance and an appeal to a greater good.