

proof enough for the Liberal Party to realise what the people see as their priority.

That is not to say I do not support the market gardeners. I feel for them, and I have worked with them on many occasions, trying to see if we can somehow have their land purchased by future governments or organisations based on market value so as not to cheat them and rob them of their livelihoods and the investment in the land that many of them consider to be their superannuation. It is a unique area, but they need to be looked after. As late as last year they had to use town water for watering, which was expensive for them. We have always tried to lobby to make it easier for them, but in the present shortage we are using town water for irrigation or for watering systems in our vegetable-growing area, and we should not do that in future. We should put this matter completely out of the way and forget about it.

In the lead-up to the federal election I would urge the Liberal Party not to come out with some false promise and build up the hopes and emotions of those people. It will not happen and cannot happen in the area, because the issue has been put to rest once and for all — unless you are going to close down Melbourne Airport or shift it to a completely different location, because you will endanger aeroplanes and affect flight paths in that region.

We have introduced sugar gliders, kangaroos, and a lot of other native fauna and flora into that park, which in the past was a market garden which was overgrazed. We have redeveloped it with a huge number of volunteers, who have spent their time planting trees and looking after it, even changing the nesting boxes for the sugar gliders and other animals that we have in the region. We control the rabbits and foxes in the area, another problem that existed in the past. All the volunteers, who are environmentally conscious, are totally appalled by the proposal. There must be another way. The decommissioning of the sewage treatment plant was the time for the Liberal Party, when it was in government, to have acted and said, 'This water could be further refined and used for the market gardeners'.

As I said the plant was there in my early years in Parliament. I was on the Keilor council when it gave the permit to establish the treatment plant there. There were no objections from the Keilor community. The treated water kept going into the Maribyrnong River, but the government and the Environment Protection Authority decided that we should clean it up and not have treated sewage going down the river. We cleaned up the Maribyrnong River, so it is safe enough now to catch fish — and there are plenty of fish in that area.

But in my opinion the water could have been used for the market gardeners, because the shortage of water for market gardeners is not something new. It has been happening on a perennial basis.

### **Bushfires: impacts**

**Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition)** — I wish to grieve for all the Victorians impacted by the recent bushfires, particularly those who are dealing with the aftermath of those bushfires. As I am sure many members know, we have endured six to eight weeks of hell because of the bushfires. **Over 1 million hectares has been burnt**, most of it public land, but we should not underestimate the damage to private property as well. We should also not underestimate the incredible dislocation of communities, the loss of natural resources, **the damage to the environment, the wiping out of wildlife**, the loss of business and tourism, and the loss of income.

The bushfires are a reminder of the tragedies at Wilsons Promontory in 2003 and in the Grampians in the last 18 months. The loss of one life was a tragedy in itself, and others have spoken about that in detail.

Regarding the causes of the bushfires, obviously lightning strikes in the high country are one, but we should not ignore the fires that were deliberately lit and some of the back-burning failures which led to the loss of structures like Cresta Lodge at Mount Buffalo. The areas impacted, as many members know, cover an enormous number of hectares in the north-east and Gippsland, including the Ovens, Wangaratta, Mansfield, Dargo, Kiewa, Macalister and Howqua regions. The coverage has been extraordinary.

The trauma involved is probably unprecedented and very difficult to even contemplate in an environment such as the one we work in. Some members have participated in the firefighting, and they will understand the fear, apprehension and anxiety that lasted over six to eight weeks and the darkness that fell when the bushfires came. I and no doubt other members have looked at the photographs that were taken. Those who were there were aware of the depth of the smoke — looking at the daytime photographs you cannot distinguish them from the night-time photographs — and the noise, the heat and the simple duration of the tension.

Not much good comes from experiences like those, but at least we can say from these bushfires that there has been an incredible rise in community togetherness and spirit in those areas. I believe there is also an incredible determination to make changes and to not simply

accept that this is something that happens and will happen again and that we cannot do anything about it.

I wish to pay simple tribute to all the residents in those areas who fought the fires, to the families and property owners who fought them and, in particular, to the Country Fire Authority volunteers. The CFA in particular remains one of the most incredible icons of the Victorian community. I also pay tribute to the Department of Sustainability and Environment staff, the police and emergency services personnel and the supporting agencies. I want to mention the media, particularly those who gave constant radio coverage. I believe the media got the message out very well at a difficult time when there would have been a lot of stress on some of the journalists. Both the TV and the newspapers did an incredible job.

I will also mention the leadership of the people involved in fighting the fires. Bruce Esplin made a particular effort to keep me and others on our side of the house informed about the detailed operations. We tried not to get in the way, but I appreciate the lengths he went to. There were an incredible number of individuals involved. I do not want to single out a lot, but I want to mention some whom I encountered before, during and after the fires. Firstly I mention Jane and Andrew Dwyer. Andrew is the CFA captain of Jamieson, who quite serendipitously ended up being the public face of the firefighters up there. I also mention people like Alan Dobson, who was one of the leaders in terms of the bushfire control, and CFA officer Siobhan Carson, who unstintingly got out the message about 'Prepare, stay and save'.

I think that message got through. Extraordinary characters like Gil and Sheila Lund, who would not be described as young, attracted some attention to themselves at Ten Mile, down the Jamieson Road. They sat on their porch and watched the bushfires around them, completely and utterly surrounded, and when we visited, the bushfires having been through the night before, the dry comment from Gil Lund was simply, 'It was better than Ivanhoe at Christmas'. They are not young, they have seen it all before and they understand what has gone on.

In the Macalister Valley are extraordinary people like Mark and Tania Coleman. I know, Acting Speaker, you have met with them and those who fought the fires up the Macalister Valley and the high country. Ray and Mary Winter at the Licola store have extraordinary tales to tell. Rob Gilder lost 120 kilometres of his own boundary fences. Having cut a lot of feed in advance of the fires, he found a lot of it was lost but then he was

good enough to distribute much of it at the same time. He lost his woolshed, and he lost stock.

Many members over the years have received correspondence from Ralph Barraclough. Ralph lives up in the Glencairn area on what I think we would describe as a small property. He manages to email the world from there and has done so for many years. He predicted all of this. He has been predicting it for years, and what he said came true. I met Kevin Higgins, Greg Oatley and Danny Richards at the top of the Great Divide. They are extraordinary people who have had extraordinary experiences, and I pay tribute to them all.

The challenge from these bushfires is to learn from them and to not let the awe that we might have for the experience get in the way of the hard questions — and there are hard questions to be answered, some of which are: could this disaster have been avoided? Was it inevitable? Could the impact have been reduced? Have management policies contributed to the extent of the fires? Are we doing enough to help the recovery?

Obviously there will be different opinions about answers to those questions, but when I stood on the top of the Divide on the Licola–Jamieson road with two bushmen who are very experienced in fighting fires and asked them the simple question, 'How much of that million hectares could we have avoided burning?', as one, simultaneously, without any consultation, they said, 'Probably up to 90 per cent'. There is a message there. It is too easy for those of us who live in the city to simply turn away and say, 'The fires are out, some rain has come and we will get on with it'. We see pictures of the forests regenerating in part, and it is too easy for us to simply say, 'It is over. We do not have to think about it again'. That is not the case.

There are phases of this experience that we need to examine: preparation and land management, the firefighting itself, the aftermath, the recovery period and an assessment of the cost. When it comes to preparation and land management, there are issues. One million hectares did burn, and there are very strong views that preparation and land management were not adequate, that we did not do enough controlled burns, that there were not sufficient cool burns in the off-season, that there was not sufficient fuel reduction, that fire access tracks were not open and accessible, that we have suffered a loss of expertise in the high country in terms of bushfire fighting and that we did not have sufficient fire breaks. There are real questions being asked in these areas, and they are being asked again, because they were asked after previous bushfires. These are policy decisions, and it is evident that some of those policy decisions have failed us.

In the firefighting arena — and I do not pretend to be an expert — from my observation and from talking to people before, during and after, there have been some advances since 2003. It seems that there are better communications, at least between the CFA and the DSE. There is excellent mobilisation of CFA numbers, and the community meeting arrangements — and I had the opportunity to attend some of those meetings — were excellent, as were the overseas support, the education of property owners, which I mentioned before, to ‘prepare, stay and save’, and the mapping availability.

Nevertheless there are still shortcomings evident, and questions need to be asked and addressed, such as whether we should have additional Erickson Aircreane helicopter services like the Elvis helicopter available or whether we should have our own; the extent and accuracy of the mapping available; the loss of area line tracking, which was significant when the smoke intervened and we could not actually locate the fire front for many nights; the balance of burn and fallback techniques versus strike team deployment; and the necessity for early intervention. Standing there at the top of the Divide and surveying those areas one can understand that cool burning might have prevented some of this damage and that **areas that were cool burnt are in much better shape than those that were not.** It was disappointing to understand that early intervention might have prevented the fire spread.

There were constraints from above on experienced strike teams. Fine; I understand that routine, but those experienced teams are saying that they wanted more flexibility on the ground to make their own decisions. There were limits on the preparation of firebreaks, where bulldozer drivers were told not to knock over trees to ensure that trees were protected in the interest of the environment, but the net result of that was that the firebreak makes no difference and those who have spent their time have wasted their time. It is just not effective.

Other shortcomings include limits on controlled burns; on-ground communications were difficult — in many areas there were no communications, and people had no idea where the fire front was; the lack of decision making at the micro level; and mapping details. We need to have line markings on any maps that are published. The variability of the maps, the variable formats and the accuracy of the maps were issues.

In the aftermath there have been some immediate and good intentions implemented: community meetings, mutual support and the beginning of the clean-up. But to use an analogy which was put to me very poignantly

by one family, and perhaps to you as well, Acting Speaker, ‘Then the casseroles stopped coming’. When a young mother is enjoying her first baby, the family gathers around for a few weeks, but then the casseroles stop coming. In many areas the casseroles have now stopped coming.

There are plenty of issues to address. These communities and families have been left to deal with them on their own, whether it is fencing — and there are hundreds of kilometres of fencing to be dealt with and the associated insurance issues — stock; water; topsoil; phones; the simple workload involved; the trauma; the family tensions which occur and the fact that children, who were sidelined for a holiday period, have had to stand back and watch parents struggling with maintaining jobs and firefighting on their properties; and the loss of income, business, tourism and simple infrastructure. They are things that have to be addressed and are not being addressed. We have to get the casseroles back as well!

The long-term impact is there for those communities to appreciate. Sadly those in the city probably have no idea of the impact of the lost breeding stock and the loss of expertise. I heard the Leader of The Nationals talking about the loss of the timber resource, and I think it is a timely reminder. It is estimated that between \$2 billion and \$3 billion of timber in the high country was lost, which was part of the future resource. That is now being cut down as well as possible, because many of the alpine ash are dead and do not regenerate. It needs to be cut down quickly before it splits, which is putting a strain on the roads there. They are not the greatest roads and that is likely to lead to a long-term maintenance issue. **There has been a loss of water, water quality** and road infrastructure. Bridges have been lost, isolating some communities. **There has been an incredible loss of topsoil in the Macalister Valley** and there is a need to reseed all of that. Obviously signage and tourism brochures are okay, but it is not enough. We need to do more.

The cost of these bushfires will be enormous. The simple cost to the economy will run into the billions of dollars. I understand the government response in the areas it has dealt with, but at the moment the response has been to deal with hundreds of thousands of dollars here and there. We must make a reassessment in 3, 6 and 12 months time, and indeed in two years time. We have to increase the financial support — and I agree with the Leader of The Nationals in that respect. We have to have a public inquiry, not a private one, and preferably a parliamentary inquiry. I note the sorts of submissions already made by the Wellington shire. It is

an excellent submission to government, and it needs a greater response.

From the observations of many of the experienced people who fought these fires, **we need to change the culture around land management** and preparation, and some of the firefighting culture which has perhaps become more risk averse than it has been in the past. The important thing is that we do not forget these local communities. Whether it is contracting locally, offering financial support, providing the tourism opportunities, we must not forget these communities. We must be out there on a daily basis. It is incumbent on everybody in this chamber to do that for at least the next two years.

### **Climate change: Liberal Party policy**

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park) — I rise to grieve for the community of my electorate of Mill Park and all Victorians and Australians who are receiving extremely poor leadership from the federal government and the state opposition in Victoria on the issue of climate change. I refer the house to the leading work being undertaken by the Bracks Labor government on this very matter, from a far-reaching water policy to our commitment to the signing of the Kyoto protocol and the action to tackle carbon emissions. These all have consequences on our climate.

Climate change is real and has consequences on our water supplies and the temperature of our planet. There is no starker example of the effects that the actions that one country has on another than that which is caused by carbon emissions. The effects of industrial pollution in one country by way of carbon emissions have serious impacts on the globe. Excessive carbon emissions of the leading industrial nations have consequences which must be addressed, yet Prime Minister John Howard and the Leader of the Opposition's responses to the problems remind me of the famous Oscar Wilde quote, 'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars'.

Despite the widespread expert commentary over recent weeks and months on the link between carbon emissions and climate change and the effects on the world, John Howard's response to a question on ABC TV on 5 February considering what Australia would be like if average temperatures around the globe rose by 4 to 6 degrees by the end of the century was, 'Well, it would be less comfortable for some than it is now'. That is an extraordinary comment from someone who is ill prepared and less than comfortable and relaxed about the quandary that is before us.

The state opposition leader in September last year was very squarely a sceptic of climate change and the lasting problems for our community. Of course there was a lack of any credible climate change policy that was presented in the lead-up to the state election. The member for Keilor previously referred to a number of grab-bag policy announcements that were made on the run to deal with environmental matters, which is a clear indication of the lack of preparedness and lack of acceptance of the real problem confronting us in terms of the link between carbon emissions and climate change.

As I said, the Leader of the Opposition was unsure whether climate change was a temporary phenomenon. He said that it was a matter for experts, threw his hands up in the air and left it at that. That showed quite blatantly that he and his party were ill prepared for leadership. His federal counterparts are also ill prepared on this very question. On the question of leadership there was none. We got plenty of mixed messages from the state opposition in the lead-up to the election. In fact that is certainly a disease within federal government corridors.

Look at the state opposition's election commitment to scrap Labor's renewable energy targets scheme, with no binding targets to replace it, and contrast it with state Labor's plan, which is full of action, clear in direction and offers a real choice. Labor has plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 and to establish a biofuels industry to manufacture 400 million litres a year of ethanol or biodiesel fuel by 2010, with a target of 5 per cent of all vehicle fuels being biofuel by 2010. Further, it has plans to cut registration fees for hybrid cars by \$50.

It is becoming increasingly evident with the passing of time — 10 years at the federal level — that John Howard moves only on matters which he is comfortable with and relaxed about. Let us have a look at his record on that. He was relaxed and comfortable about going to war in Iraq on the shaky grounds of that country having weapons of mass destruction and the say-so of the United States of America. He is relaxed and comfortable about destroying a fair system of wages, workplace safety and conditions of employment for ordinary working people and their families — and the WorkChoices laws are the carrier of that philosophy. John Howard is relaxed and comfortable about blaming victims and refugees by locking them up for years, children and all, and about having unfair processes to deal with their claims.

There is also the trickiness and political posturing of his offer to the states for the rehabilitation of the