

The Tragedy of the Bushfires has one Silver Lining...

Shôn Ellerton, January 4, 2020

Our bushfires have been awful. Many have lost their houses. Some have lost their lives. And the bushfires keep going on. But there is one silver lining to it all.



It's an understatement that our recent bushfires in Australia has been devastating. According to the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, more than 1,300 homes have been destroyed in New South Wales alone. Vast areas in South Australia, including Kangaroo Island have been decimated. Even Tasmania has suffered terribly.

I personally know three people who have been severely affected by the fires and, statistically, this makes up for an alarmingly high figure of how many people must be affected nationally. I made a few phone calls to the people I know who have been affected to see how things are going hoping that everyone is safe. Thankfully, I haven't heard of any casualties, but the worry and the stress must be taking a terrible toll. On a national level, there are nearly twenty percent of properties that are not insured. Some have lost everything.

Turning on the news in the morning during the last few days has all been about the fires. It is what's on most everybody's minds. How can they be stopped? How can we help? How can they be prevented in the future? Is there enough effort in working together to help others during this calamity? Firefighters and other ancillary workers are working around the clock to help and many newcomers are offering to volunteer their services; however, untrained fire volunteers may be more of a hindrance than a service. An ex-colleague and friend of mine in Melbourne has become a volunteer fireman and it takes training to become one. The overarching advice by the fire service is to obey instructions from the fire service, evacuate when asked and try to be safe.

Unfortunately, the stories of courage and bravery are sometimes overshadowed by the rising anger, hate and finger pointing to those who are, allegedly, responsible for preventing such calamities. Today, I spoke to a retired government official and we discussed the pros and cons of controlled fire burning. I recounted my memories of business trips to Darwin and the surrounds during the dry season. I observed many controlled fires in action and noted that boundaries between larger properties had 10 metre firebreaks, essentially a 'no-man's land' kept clear of vegetation. Could they have worked elsewhere? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Some people blame the ecologists that controlled fire burning creates pollution. Some suggest that controlled fire burning is not always easily controllable and further suggest that the topography of coastal areas around NSW along with its dense population may prove to be difficult to do so. In any case, it is a hotbed of discussion.

One thing for sure, and this is the *one* silver lining in the cloud. When calamities, disasters and wars happen, all the petty little issues are left behind. There is no talk of hate speech, gender politics, diversity and equality, wowsers politics, and all the stuff discussed and pondered over by a bored media. At the end of the day, when major events occur such as our bushfire disaster, all the other insignificant issues are 'forgotten', although they will, unfortunately, re-surface once everything settles down again.