

Preparedness essential as bushfire risk grows

The bushfire risks that face our city have never been more daunting.

A Climate Council report reveals the ACT faces a greater number of extreme risk days this year, with bushfires predicted to spread to larger areas, increase in numbers and spread into spring and autumn.

The capital's urban design has been identified as a "unique challenge" for fires, according to the report. It states that more than 9000 homes are within 400 to 700 metres of bushland, a number that could swell as the ACT's population swells.

A well-prepared and drilled force, which has demonstrated time and time again its dedication to keeping our communities safe, can be the difference between small-scale

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fire damage and absolute devastation. Volunteers, regular men and women willing to put their lives on the line to ensure others' safety, are the lifeblood of this effort.

Their individual acts of bravery, determination and resilience demonstrate we are a lucky community to have selfless individuals who would be prepared to give up so much for the greater good.

Traditionally, rural fire services have attracted a predominantly older make-up of baby boomers - prompting allegations that generation Y neither has the inclination or

the interest to ensure community safety.

However, the ACT is bucking this trend, as revealed in today's *Sunday Canberra Times*.

Nearly half - 48 per cent - of the ACT's rural firefighters are now aged just 34 or younger. Whereas volunteers over 45 make up 61 per cent of NSW's rural volunteer ranks, the equivalent tier in the ACT accounts for just 29 per cent.

Credit should go to the volunteers, who prove, as one captain has said, that Canberra does have a soul.

The Rural Fire Service has done a fantastic job embracing online communication to manage its younger charges. With a wider demographic now represented, the service is now more social and inclusive -

which can only encourage a more effective force to battle whatever dangers lie ahead.

Despite increased participation across the age spectrum, the importance of vigilance cannot be understated.

The Prepare, Act, Survive message, especially pertinent in the nation's bush capital cannot go ignored.

Bushfires have no concern for state and territory borders; we must ensure we learn from the lessons of the past to minimise our risks in the future.

We implore Canberrans to help support our firefighters any way they can in the fight to ensure our safety this summer.

Letters to the Editor

Opt for recyclable goods

In "Buy nothing new", (CT Relax, September 28), avoiding purchasing new consumer goods for a year in favour of recycling and re-using is suggested.

A commendable idea but, for many, a rather impossible one to implement for any length of time, let alone a year.

An alternative approach to promoting responsible consumption could involve a lifelong commitment to acquiring a modicum of new and used goods while giving preference to those that are recyclable.

At the end of any given item's life, could it be put in the compost? Is there a recycling stream for it, or will it end up in landfill?

Community and environmentally responsible consumption are more likely to be promoted if we use our purchasing power to compel manufacturers to mainly produce goods that are biodegradable or otherwise recyclable.

Jorge Gappella, Kaleen

What's wrong with us?

Counter-terrorism and deradicalisation experts may profitably engage in introspection to determine what it is about Australian society that so repulses youngsters they choose to forsake family and community protection to engage in life-endangering jihadist activities. (Jihadists homesick, Sunday CT, September 28).

The conclusions from such introspection may be socially painful.

Albert M. White, Queanbeyan

Heaps of rat heaven

While we discourage cats and encourage urban recycling, there appears to be a surge in another introduced species.

The compost heap is pocked by rat-sized holes dug by appreciative rodents. Such communities are



noted reservoirs for all sorts of nasty bugs.

Gary Wilson, MacGregor

Parking-fine pig still pig

It doesn't really matter how much lipstick Australian Federal Police Chief Executive Dennis Gellatly puts on the police action parking-fine pig (CT Letters Sept 21).

The stench of that action will carry and also soil the reputation of the police force, its associated bureaucrats, officials and court officers who enforce unjustifiable penalties on basically law-observing citizens.

It is time that MLAs took their snouts out of the trough topped up by these fines and the endeavours of an unrepresentative "Independent" Remuneration Tribunal, and did something to provide a measure of fairness to ACT citizens threatened with both fines and a criminal record for

minor traffic breaches such as those described by Jack Waterford.

Ric Hingee, Duffy

Constitutional changes

Au contraire, Frank Marris ("Learn the Constitution", CT Letters, Sep 28). Section 128 allows for the alteration of the Constitution, albeit with a number of conditions. Thus, under Section 128, it is possible (but unlikely) that Section 121 could be altered to read, for example, "121. The Parliament may admit to the Commonwealth or establish new States or may expel any existing States and may upon such admission or establishment or expulsion make or impose such terms and conditions..."

"Indissoluble" meant then, and still means, that the Commonwealth of Australia, as originally constituted, but subject to the admission (or expulsion) of any new States under Section 121, cannot revert to

the pre-1900 position, i.e. a collection of individual colonies occupying Terra Australis. However, if, in their wisdom, the people of Australia decided that federalism really was not working and that dissolving the Commonwealth into six, seven, eight or more individual, independent states was the way to go, then there is not much that Parliament in Westminster could do about it!

Paul Bowler, Holder

Stasi-land here we come

How does restricting our freedoms protect Australia's democratic "fair go" values? The draconian security laws risk setting ASIO on the path of the East German Stasi. Who polices the security police?

Lois Wishart, Hughes

Get along with all

I rarely feel the need to write to express my feelings ... but I fail to understand the

thinking of our government. I am an English migrant and Australian citizen of 15 years.

We live in a democratic and multicultural society.

Why is it then deemed by our politicians acceptable to discriminate against and segregate women because of their clothing?

If they perceive them as a threat to their safety, which I strongly doubt, why is it then OK to seat these so-called threats with school-children visiting parliament?

This is wrong on so many different levels.

I feel that the leaders of our country need to take their lead from the level-headed majority of this great land and get along with all who live here.

Mark Hedges, Macgregor

These two legs bad

The spectacle of Scott Morrison and the Cambodian Prime Minister having a champagne toast to cele-

brate putting our poor refugees in yet further misery, reminds me of the pigs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Richard Keys, Ainslie

'Team' a cruel sham

The government's confected "niqab crisis" has plumbed new depths in terms of dog-whistle appeals to bigotry. The fact that all people are regularly identified and screened at airports without drama appears to be lost on hysterical extremists like Cory Bernardi and Jacqui Lambie. Tony Abbott belatedly "condemns" their views while welcoming the electoral boost the Coalition receives from fearmongering. His appeal for all of us to be part of "Team Australia" is shown to be a cruel sham when he promotes policies that divide the community.

In 1861, when a terrible civil war was about to begin, Abraham Lincoln was able to articulate what a divided America needed in order to heal itself:

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Australia needs leaders today who will appeal to those "better angels", not to suspicion and hatred.

Steve Ellis, Hackett

Bridal-veiled threat

When you research the bridal veil it is just as demeaning to women as the "burqa", and probably just as dangerous to humanity.

K Calvert, Downer

YOUR SAY

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