

'Gross Mismanagement': Green Forestry Policies Blamed for Fueling Australian Bush Fires

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Australia's catastrophic bush fires that have burned 15.6 million acres have been widely blamed on human-caused climate change, but some climate experts claim that the devastation follows years of eco-driven government policies discouraging prescribed burns, tree-thinning and firebreak-building – in the name of forest and habitat preservation. The bush fires have been compared to a spate of deadly California wildfires sparked by power lines in forests choked with dead and tinder-dry trees after years of drought and hands-off timber policies. Patrick Michaels, who served as Virginia state climatologist for 27 years, said that until the dry understory brush is cleaned up, these regions will be subject to horrific fires every year.

Australia's catastrophic bush fires have been widely blamed on human-caused climate change, but evidence is mounting that the devastation has more to do with environmentalist policies than fossil fuel emissions.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has taken the brunt of popular anger for the wildfires, which have consumed about 15.6 million acres, but the devastation follows years of eco-driven government policies discouraging prescribed burns, tree-thinning and firebreak-building in the name of forest and habitat preservation, some climate scholars

say.

Combine that with population growth and prolonged drought after years of high foliage growth driven by above-average rainfall, and you have a recipe for disaster, said **Myron Ebell**, director of the Center for Energy and Environment at the free market Competitive Enterprise Institute.

“Once the drought hit, all this new vegetation means there are new and bigger fires. And the reason there are more and bigger fires is that they have basically stopped prescribed burns,” said Mr. **Ebell**.

He called **Australia**’s policy “a stunning example of criminal human mismanagement.”

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“Both California and **Australia** have made it very hard to do the prescribed burning that is necessary to prevent catastrophic fires,” said CEI senior fellow Patrick Michaels, who served as Virginia state climatologist for 27 years.

He and Mr. **Ebell** cited data indicating that prescribed burn activity has plummeted over the past 50 years while the area charred by bush fires has trended upward.

“They will be subject to horrific fires every year until the understory is cleaned up, with or without global warming,” Mr. Michaels said. “The brush dries out enough every year to burn because of the average climate, not climate change.”

That is hardly the message conveyed by climate activists and celebrities confronted with horrific images of raging infernos that have claimed at least 28 lives, destroyed more than 2,600 homes and scorched more than 25.7 million acres. The area affected since the fires began in earnest is larger than Indiana.

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