

I AM dismayed that the royal commission appears to be a place where attendees get a free kick at the expense of the CFA.

Wake up and smell the roses, Victoria. Without the courageous efforts of the CFA and its volunteers, the fires would have destroyed many more communities and would probably be still burning today.

These constant assaults on the CFA are an assault on the hard-working volunteers who give up their time and take risks to protect the community. Stop blaming them for a once-in-a-generation fire spurred on by almost unbelievable weather conditions.

If I were a CFA volunteer I would be questioning why I do it when the thanks I receive for taking risks is criticism from some in the media and an apparently ungrateful public.

I say to the CFA and its members everywhere on behalf of the silent majority in regional Victoria, thank you for being there, thank you for your efforts and thank you for a job well done.

David Kemp, Lancefield

True professionals

TO DESCRIBE the hobby farmers of Taggerty Heights as Dad's Army (*The Age*, 11/6) suggests they were amateurs. Not true. There was a truly professional state of preparedness and a model for all communities at risk. They were prepared for all external back up, communication and support to fail, as they did. A similar degree of preparation, although more difficult in larger communities, would have saved many lives in Marysville, Kinglake and Strathewen. Good planning, building standards and firefighting services are necessary, but not sufficient to reduce bushfire disaster risk to an acceptable level.

Emeritus Professor Paul Grundy, AM, department of civil engineering, Monash University, Blackburn

Brains, not brawn

CONTRARY to Rod Liesfield's assertion (*Letters*, 12/6), fuel reduction burning at the wrong time or with the wrong frequency does impact negatively on the environment. Controlled burning conducted too frequently can, in some vegetation types, even result in an increase in fuel load.

When Judge Stretton said after the 1939 bushfires that "they had not lived long enough", he was suggesting European settlers were still too naive about the nature and natural cycles of the landscape to have understood the consequences of their lack of environmental knowledge and careless use of fire. We have now lived long enough in this state to have gained an understanding of fires, if only we had bothered.

Instead of learning how to manage its biological processes for the benefit of the environment and the people, we have been too busy trying to bully Australia's environment into submission. Black Saturday was a savage reminder that we have failed purely through the use of brawn. Perhaps we should try using our brains instead.

Helen Moss, Croydon

WATAGE 6006

THANDBERG

Madden ignores own panel's advice

BASTION Point, Mallacoota, is one of the last easily accessible, wilderness beaches in Victoria. There's a plan to stuff it up with a breakwater, a beach road, and a permanent sand dredge. An inquiry found overwhelmingly against the plan's suitability. In particular, it found "serious concerns in relation to the safety of all the new proposals" and that estimates of economic benefits were not justified. The majority of residents are against the plan, though it is divisive.

The development is not about jobs because abalone divers can already get out to sea. But as the proposal will intrude on the beauty of the whole area of coast, it may threaten jobs. In fact, the inquiry said that "all options will have an overall net detriment to tourism".

So what does the Brumby Government do? Planning Minister Justin Madden trots out a "yes" to the proposal, trying to justify it — against the evidence — as based on safety concerns.

Patsy Lisle, Altona

Out of control

PLANNING Minister Madden approved a boat ramp development in Mallacoota on Thursday despite the planning process finding the project faulty on economic, social and environmental grounds.

Our analysis showed the economic case to be seriously flawed, with operational costs being underestimated by 275 per cent, capital costs by 30 per cent and benefits heavily overstated by junk economic modelling. The panel agreed.

While clearly not a project to be supported by precious local government funds, Madden disregarded the panel's decision despite the damning evidence.

The planning process is out of control. Why bother with an assessment process when a minister can veto on a whim? It's time to get some rigour in the planning processes. Let's hope Minister Gavin Jennings withholds his consent under the Coastal Management Act.

Simon O'Connor and Tristan Knowles, Economists at Large, Melbourne

Port Campbell at risk

THE Island Arch near Loch Ard Gorge has just collapsed. A few weeks ago an entire sea cavern also collapsed at the Bay of Islands. The fragility of the Port Campbell coastline is obvious.

Despite this, developers are proposing to build on the Port Campbell headland the Southern Ocean Beach House, which includes a 100-room hotel, 10 shops and a 200-seat restaurant.

Geotechnical specialists have advised the Government that the overscale excavation and foundations for the hotel near four major sea caverns is high risk and likely to accelerate collapse of the headland. They also warned of the high public risk and liability.

The Government's own policies show it is unwise to build large structures near fragile cliffs. It's time the Government halted the development. Port Campbell is at risk.

Marion Manifold, Port Campbell Community Group, Port Campbell

Change the tactics

BARBARA Demick's question "How do you solve a problem like (North) Korea with sanctions?" (*The Age*, 12/6) has a simple answer: change the tactics. North Korea's development of nuclear bombs and long-range missiles can be directly attributable to the failure of the US policy of threat as a means to contain the "rogue" state. The threats included nuking the country, surrounding the borders with air and naval bases with the most lethal weapons in the US arsenals, and US-initiated crippling economic sanctions. None of these tactics worked.

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Bill Mathew, Parky

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