



30th March

Bushfire review,

Having been involved in the bushfire in Kelmscott/Rokystone I would like the review board to note:-

① Not enough constant information on days banned from any use of fires - machines etc. Weather reports give U.V. ratings each night why not fire ban levels.

② In the event of a bad fire people not receiving enough quick information in their area of progress.

③ Fire hazards not cleared from verge parks & foot land constantly.

④ Councils issuing preparation lists in the event at the beginning of summer by way of a flyer - (like verge pick-ups)

Dr Butti

Thank you for the opportunity to list some of my concerns

Mrs M. J. Armstrong

**Submission to the
Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review**

Submissions should be submitted electronically (preferred) to:

or posted to:

Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review
Locked Bag 10, Cloisters Square
PERTH WA 6850

Note: All submissions received will be made available on the Inquiry's website. People wishing to make a confidential submission should make this clear at the time of lodgement and the Inquiry will not publish those submissions. However, people should be aware that whilst every endeavour will be made to ensure confidentiality, there is a possibility that such submissions might be released in accordance with the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.

Contact Details

Name:	Malcolm McCallum
Address:	
Email address:	
Telephone number:	

Organisation Details (Where Applicable)

Is this submission presented on behalf of an organisation:	Yes / No
If yes, name of organisation:	
Position in organisation:	

Response to Terms of Reference

- 1. The adequacy of current preventative measures, specifically prescribed burning and other bushfire mitigation activities.**

Preventive measures leading up to the recent hills bushfire, were not only inadequate, but almost non-existent.

Armadale City has been seriously negligent in their administration of the Bushfires Act 1954. FESA should probably have assumed responsibilities by default, but emergency preparedness seems to rate a low priority in this state. If 5% of the effort spent on collection of traffic and parking fines was allocated to safety planning and risk mitigation, this situation would never have arisen. But \$ return on investment seems to be much more important (at state & local levels) than lives and property of the electorate.

The City's annual publication (your rates at work) officially notifies owners & occupiers of land of their responsibilities pursuant to section 33 of the Act. During the 24 years we have lived at this property on the Highway, however, I have never had a property inspection, nor have I heard of anyone being forced to comply with the annual notice, despite numerous and blatant examples of contempt for the directions. Since the City itself ignores the highway verge and drains, which are strewn with rubbish and highly inflammable weeds (mainly *Watsonia*), I was too cynical to raise my concerns about the obvious risks. I know of two fellow owners who did contact the City about fire hazards in their vicinity, and they were met with placating reassurances that there was not an "unacceptable risk". We have found ranger services to be cooperative in our contacts, but I suspect limitations of their activities may be due to political will rather than grass roots negligence.

Our house was the first one threatened by the recent blaze, and I was at the spot where it could have been extinguished with a single bucket of water. The property at 401, where the burn became out of control, was derelict and there was no garden hose on the tap nearby, as we had repeatedly asked the owner to ensure. The flames were almost extinguished, when they escaped into the dense, dry scrub at #401, and the *Watsonia* covered verge adjoining. Our preventive measures were not comprehensive, in hindsight. But with a green orchard and minimal understory on our property, the fire could have still been contained within 3 blocks if our neighbours (on either side) had maintained a low risk, parkland environment as well.

All land occupiers are responsible to mitigate the risks, but the City must ensure compliance with their notice, and maintain the verges, or **THEY** are derelict.

As a biologist with 34 years agricultural experience, and formal qualifications in risk management, I can offer an opinion on prescribed burning.

The stable native woodland in this area consists of wandoo and marri, with a diverse understory of low shrubs. Before exotic weed invasion, this community could recover after occasional fire, with a succession involving *Pimelia ciliata*, *Acacia pulchella*, *Gastrolobium spinatum*, *Trymalium odoratissimum* and some *Hakea* spp. These are relatively vigorous, short lived and exceptionally inflammable plants. They are actually encouraged by frequent (prescribed?) burning, and the dominant trees (wandoo especially), and slow growing shrubs cannot regenerate. Feral weeds such as *watsonia* (and blackberries in watercourses) have established as well, and these species are similarly encouraged by frequent burns and the fuel load is compounded.

Watsonia (remaining green well into spring) also affects the efficacy of fuel reduction burns or dangerously delays their timing.

Prescribed burning is not a simple panacea, and mechanical &/or chemical control options are much more applicable in this granite loam environment.

Further up the scarp on the jarrah/ banksia country with laterite soil however, prescribed burning may well be the best strategy for fuel reduction. Restricting this activity to exclude Sundays and public holidays however, makes it difficult for working commuters to observe the FESA advice to only burn around 10 days after rain. Many rely on volunteer fire fighting groups to assist with this activity, but **they** can't always fulfil the minimum requirements. Maybe licenced contractors could cover for peak demand. Landowners get billed either way.

2. The impact of land use, environmental and building laws, practices and policies in the affected areas, affecting bushfire prevention, mitigation and response and what, if any, changes may be required.

There are very few containment lines (roads, firebreaks) through Banyowla or Wungong Regional Parks. We have witnessed 5 major bushfires within our area since 1986, and each time there is a mad panic to create firebreaks on several fronts in extremely difficult terrain. There are multiple cul de sacs within our vicinity, and one fallen tree or broken vehicle could easily block the escape of 20 or more families with only one way in or out. Ad-hoc planning in the past can still be rectified.

Prescribed burning in our area may not be the best way to go, but a few hours investment by the Department of Environment & Conservation (DEC) every 2 years, maintaining firebreaks (with spray or machinery) should be achievable within their designated areas. Maybe some of the ES levy on rates should be made available to cover costs. Similarly, the Main Roads Department (MRD) and other agencies should be subject to the same requirements as private landowners with respect to risk mitigation. Bushfires don't discriminate.

Containment lines and vehicle access need to be improved and maintained within the areas administered by DEC and the City of Armadale.

Many of the properties destroyed by the recent disaster were semi-rural, with annual pasture fronting the access road, and native bush surrounding or behind the buildings. Most of these owners have no legal sanction or expertise regarding the keeping of livestock to control the pasture. Even when required firebreaks are maintained around these properties, they are of no use when fire races through gum trees and dry grass up to a metre high. Ranger services of the City should ensure that stocking rates are managed appropriately. If occupiers cannot control grazing effectively, strategic mowing, spraying or cultivation must be enforced. Agistment arrangements should be supervised to ensure they are legal and effective.

I saw low profile, brick structures destroyed also. Restricting the building of high set, timber & multistorey buildings in the hills would seriously reduce the amenity and lifestyle advantages that attract people there in the first place. Certainly regulation prescribing a realistic, and enforceable, low risk envelope around (and under) structures would be worth consideration.

Recommendation: drive around Darlington and Glen Forrest to see where the next wildfire disaster is waiting to happen.

The Karragullen fire in 2006 would have been a lot more damaging except for the damping effect of a belt of orchards along the edge of the scarp. Subdivision and clearing of these “safe” properties seems to be encouraged over the last few years, with a proliferation of exposed buildings surrounded by sloping, grassy paddocks. Some of the irrigation water, that used to keep thousands of fruit trees green over summer, could be used to maintain green belts of fire retardant or resistant trees. Mandatory requirements for developers to include windbreaks of this nature would not be an unreasonable obstacle. Naturally, there would also have to be a requirement for stewardship (owners or City), but such a strategy could only add to the amenity of the balding hillsides as well as fire risk mitigation.

I've heard of residential developments called 'closed communities', where potential newcomers have to provide references and justify their fitness for acceptance into the area. While I abhor elitism, the restrictions may have some merit in excluding paedophiles, hoons and junkies from communities striving for a quiet, safe lifestyle. Antisocial behaviour in urban areas can be a real nuisance, causing anxiety & weakening property values, but rarely physical danger. It may be possible to apply a similar screening process in high fire risk areas, where laziness on behalf of ignorant owners can directly contribute towards real disasters in semi-rural communities. Prospective buyers need to be aware of the extra work involved in maintaining large blocks, especially in the hills.

- 3. The actions that can and should be taken by landowners, residents and tenants in relation to bushfire risk management including undertaking vegetation clearance, operation of evaporative air-conditioners and storage and/or removal of hazardous inflammable material surrounding their dwellings and buildings. This should include consideration of associated enforcement regimes and penalties.**

The Act and associated bylaws clearly detail the requirements for land occupiers concerning vegetation control and clearance of inflammable material. Many landowners in Roleystone / Kelmscott do take their responsibilities seriously but they are not supported by the City. It only takes a few recalcitrants to negate work done by the considerate citizens. Enforcement regimes definitely need to be fortified, and the responsible authorities held accountable. Absent &/or hostile landowners cannot be granted effective exemption from regulations designed to protect whole populations. Volunteers would always assist residents suffering genuine financial hardship.

We pay inflated council rates for having semi-rural properties, but don't see much service for our extra contribution. Road verges are rarely, if ever mown or sprayed, and rubbish thrown from cars accumulates perpetually in the neglected drains and among the overgrown weeds.

Pedestrians on the Highway east of Buckingham bridge have to compete on the roadway (no footpaths) with thousands of cars and heavy trucks who are all in a big hurry. Apparently MRD are responsible for the highway reserve, but ratepayers are still entitled to a clean, safe environment in return, regardless of which road they front. The costs of annual, targeted inspections of compliance with fire risk minimisation requirements would be insignificant compared to the clean-up bill we are now facing. The Fire Control Officer and delegated rangers should be assessing and enforcing compliance with the Act on an annual basis. The costs of direct, remedial action are recoverable from non-compliant landowners. DEC and MRD should be held accountable as landowners also.

The relevance of penalties (as small as \$250 max) for noncompliance should be reviewed. Minor speeding infringements attract \$300 fines and most of the time no-one is really at risk. More realistic penalties (reflecting contemporary values) are required. That means significant fines (\$1k min for notice noncompliance) and could include something like a demerit system imposing an additional 50% annual rate penalty for repeat offenders against the Bushfires Act. That may encourage residents, more suited to conventional suburban life, to migrate accordingly.

Imposing restrictions on evaporative air conditioners would be draconian and unrealistic. Certainly residents should be reminded regularly of the dangers associated with these units & remedial options, such as 'Brivis' models, and shutting down systems in empty houses. Possibly FESA could be more proactive in its educational role. Information at point of sale could be useful.

4. The adequacy and effectiveness of information and communication campaigns and mechanisms, including systems for alerting residents in relation to the fire or potential fires.

I'm not qualified to comment in detail on this term, but we were satisfied with the response from FESA, and the fact that no human and very little livestock died in this instance suggests that the active response was effective.

High risk days and banned activities are well advertised.

No doubt some of the property destroyed could have been saved if the occupants had been there to defend it. We saved at least 4 houses locally because we had an option and chose to stay. Maybe forced evacuation is necessary in the path of the wildfire, but residents should be allowed to return to control spot fires once the front has passed.

5. Improvements that can be made in relation to the coordination of activities across all levels of government, including with volunteer groups.

Possibly overriding legislation or Authority needs to be considered to assess and enforce coordination and contribution by relevant organisations, especially concerning risk mitigation. Conservation legislation, for example, should not preclude responsibilities directly affecting significant risks to human lives.

Health & safety issues in the **workplace** take precedence over almost all inconsistent legislation. Safety of people in their **homes** should be just as important.

Mr & Mrs Stewart

26th March 2011

I wish to add my concerns to the Bushfire Review under the headings of resident responsibility and local laws/practices/policies.

I raised concerns over a neighbour a few years ago when he started to stock pile wood from cleared blocks and trees that die on the golf course, not only on his own block but also his sons vacant block which is in front of his (we are both up a battle axe driveway) some of the wood is so big it was dragged to his sons block by a excavator as it is so big one old man with a chian saw can't even make a dent in it we contacted the a councillor from Armadale shire and a Fire Control Officer for this area both came up the councillor was horrified that it was in open view and insisted it be all moved onto his block and hidden behind his trees it was not all moved as all he could get to move it was a bob cat which couldn't move the massive pieces which are still where they were dumped the Fire Officers response was the stump is of concern as that will burn for weeks but the neighbour will burn before we will I do not find that to be a satisfactory remark from a fire officer and as there's about twenty meters between his closest wood pile and our house with nothing but a wire fence between us and surrounded by Jarrah trees that were not allowed to cut down when the block was cleared to build we have had our choice to stay and defend our property taken away from us and when there is a fire in Araluen we all know it's only a matter of time before someone lights up his wood stock as it certainly gets a lot of attention I fully intend sueing both the shire and the fire dept for being so blasé in a high fire risk area. We have a public access way on our street to use if a fire blocks the Heritage Drive end of the street but as the shire in its wisdom has built storm water levees with ditches on the golf course side and the only flat area of about three meters wide has a she oak right in the middle of it thus making it useless to those of us who don't have a four wheel drive and we are therefore trapped.

Another person who lives on Heritage Dr has put his winter wood as far away from his house but unfortunately he has leaned it up against Jarrah trees if these trees go up in flames that wood around the base of the trees will burn the bottom half and cause them to fall across Heritage Drive thus blocking the main escape route.

The Armadale Shire and fire dept are well aware of the stupidity of some residents and do nothing to protect the majority who take this situation seriously.

Yours sincerely

A & B Stewart.

CITY HIGHLY COMMENDED FOR BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

A comprehensive Bushfire Management Arrangements document developed by the City of Armadale has been Highly Commended in the WA section of the Australian Safer Communities Awards.

The City's Manager of Ranger and Emergency Services and Chief Bush Fire Control Officer, Brian Watkins, said the Bushfire Management Arrangements project had been recognised for its content and innovative, interactive guide providing links to key documentation relating to local, regional and state bushfire management.

The aim of the project was to develop a comprehensive document that not only contained the relevant information to assist in the management of bush fires, but presented it in such a way that allowed for information to be easily and rapidly accessible.

Mr Watkins said while individual local volunteer bushfire brigades had "Bushfire Response Plans", the Bushfire Management Arrangements built on those plans.

"The document provides the opportunity for the City of Armadale to reinforce key safety measures in the areas of Prevention, Preparedness, Responses and Recovery," he said.

The Australian Safer Communities Awards recognise innovative practices and achievements that are making our communities safer, stronger, more resilient and better

prepared to manage any emergency situation.

The awards relate to all aspects of community safety in the context of emergency management including:

- risk assessment
- research
- education and training
- information and knowledge management
- prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

From:
To:
Subject: Banjup Residents Group Submission to Perth Hills Bushfire Review
Date: Monday, 4 April 2011 1:29:32 PM
Attachments: [Banjup Residents Bushfire Review Submission.pdf](#)

Sir -

As owners of bushland properties not far from Roleystone and Kelmscott, the Banjup Residents Group is supportive of effective measures to minimise the risks of bush fires starting and to minimise their effects should fires eventuate.

Many in Banjup have had direct experience of bush fires sweeping through their properties during their 30 years of residence in the area. Drawing on their experience and the experience of others, we make the attached submission to the Perth Hills Bushfire Review.

We look forward to constructive and effective recommendations from the Perth Hills Bushfire Review.

Regards

--

Ian Thurston

**President
Banjup Residents**

BANJUP RESIDENTS GROUP

4 April 2011

Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review
Locked Bag 10
Cloisters Square
PERTH
WA 6850

Dear Sir

Submission to Perth Hills Bushfire Review

As owners of bushland properties not far from Roleystone and Kelmscott, the Banjup Residents Group is supportive of effective measures to minimise the risks of bush fires starting and to minimise their effects should fires eventuate.

The Banjup Residents Group urges consistent good practice in the management of fire hazards on bush blocks. Such good practices should form a model for all local authorities to adopt. Some local authorities put preventing minor smoke nuisance ahead of fire safety.

Local authorities in and near to the Perth Hills all have different fire permit policies, some of which are not consistent with the Bushfires Act. We attach a recent survey of 7 local authorities for your information.

We would be **supportive** of recommendations such as:

- S 1. Insisting on a clear firebreak of, say, 10 metres around each bush block dwelling
- S 2. Insisting on reducing fire hazards on bush blocks by cutting down dead trees and shrubs and cutting back vegetation overhanging firebreaks.
- S 3. Minimising restrictions on burning cuttings from cleared firebreaks during winter months.
- S 4. Local authorities encouraging systematic burning of fuel loads on bush blocks.
- S 5. FESA developing model fire emergency plans for each local area that could be readily adopted by each property owner.

For example, unless a property owner has an independently powered fire pump, large bore hoses, and a plentiful water supply, then he should not attempt to fight a fire. Instead, he should evacuate immediately to a FESA nominated assembly point, say a nearby shopping centre car park, where he and his family can be accounted for. Perhaps residents could register their fire emergency plan with FESA so that accounting for people at the time of a fire can be more easily managed.

Guidance should be provided in the model fire emergency plan that if the firefront is approaching from the east, then these are the likely local implications; from the west, then other implications might prevail.

We are **not** supportive of:

- N 1. Putting the welfare of trees around houses ahead of the safety of the people living in the houses
- N 2. Leaving piles of cuttings from firebreak clearing to dry out over summer so that smoke from their burning is minimised but in doing so substantially increasing the fire hazard on a property.
- N 3. Artificially limiting the number of fire permits issued to property owners who are demonstrably trying to minimise fire risks on their properties.

We look forward to constructive and effective recommendations from the Perth Hills Bushfire Review.

Yours faithfully



Ian Thurston

President

Banjup Residents Group

Comparison of Fire Permit Policies at 7 Local Authorities

Local Authority	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Duration of Permit (days)	Max. Number Permits
Kwinana	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			No Permit Required			14	No limit
Serp Jarrahdale	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			No Permit Required			2	No limit
Armadale	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			No Permit Required*			3	No limit
Kalamunda	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			No Permit Required			7	No limit
Mundaring	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			No Permit Required			7	No limit
Murray	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			No Permit Required			7	No limit
Cockburn	Permit Required			No Fires			Permit Required			Permit Required			7	3

*Rural zone

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Contact Details

Name:	Annique Gray
Address:	
Email address:	
Telephone number:	

Organisation Details (Where Applicable)

Is this submission presented on behalf of an organisation:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, name of organisation:	Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades of WA and Emergency Services Volunteers Association
Position in organisation:	Executive Officer

Response to Terms of Reference

You must address at least one of the Terms of Reference.

The Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades of WA (AVBFB) represents the interests of 584 Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades and their 25,000 members (approx).

The Emergency Services Volunteers Association (ESVA) represents the interests of the 25 Volunteer Fire Service (VFS) Brigades and Volunteer Emergency Service (VES) Units and their 900 members (approx).

These Units and Brigades are situated throughout Western Australia in the outer metropolitan area, the rural regions and remote communities.

The ESVA and the AVBFB provide the following information as a joint submission.

1. The adequacy of current preventative measures, specifically prescribed burning and other bushfire mitigation activities.

As advocacy agencies for responders to bushfire, the ESVA & AVBFB cannot comment on specific preventative measures undertaken in the Perth hills areas, but offer the following observations and comments in relation to prescribed burning and mitigation activities by agencies in Western Australia.

The prevention responsibilities for the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA), the Department for Environment and Conservation (DEC) and Local Government Authorities, as prescribed in the Westplan Bushfires, are considered appropriate.

Local bushfire risk management plans provide for interagency planning and hazard reduction programs that enable contributions of localised and specialised knowledge and experience.

There is no single agency in Western Australia that has the capacity to undertake adequate hazard reduction strategies for all land, nor the capacity to undertake all response. Volunteers are crucial in supporting FESA, DEC and Local Governments with hazard reduction burns and responding to wildfire.

There is an intrinsic link between hazard reduction and response, in that the hazard reduction programs provide invaluable training opportunities for response personnel (staff and volunteers) for their roles in combating wildfire.

Significant lobbying by volunteers through their local governments has given direction to State Government to increase funding for the development and implementation of bush fire mitigation strategies on unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves (Perth metro area, town sites and regional centres) that assists local governments with their wider responsibilities in fire prevention and response. Local engagement via Community Fire Managers and Community Emergency Services Managers is providing greater capacity for interagency co-operation to undertake prescribed burning, with improved collaboration between local governments, brigades/units and FESA.

Volunteers have lobbied hard to have this process implemented, and its success to date demonstrates the importance of ensuring that the project is retained and made available to more local government areas.

2. The impact of land use, environmental and building laws, practices and policies in the affected areas, affecting bushfire prevention, mitigation and response and what, if any, changes may be required.

The demand for semi-urban development by people seeking a “tree change” has resulted in landscapes with heavy vegetation and poorly accessible terrain being populated without adequate consideration for the prevention, mitigation and response to bushfires. There is an evident need for across agency/government legislation that will effectively manage/restrict development in high bushfire risk areas, such as the Perth Hills and the Western Australian coastal strip.

The lack of apparent willingness by some local governments and/or the Western Australian Planning Commission to implement and enforce legislation that addresses planning and building standards in relation to bushfire risk (whether for economic, social, political or environmental reasons) is putting both residents and fire fighters in preventable dangerous situations. There is a perception by the community that professional and volunteer fire services will save their property in the event of a fire. This is not always possible; better planning, including prohibition of development on extreme fire risk land and more appropriate building requirements in bush fire prone areas is required to prevent significant loss of property and threat to lives. The protection of persons choosing to live in high fire risk locations puts an unrealistic burden on fire fighters and unjustifiable costs on the wider community.

It appears that only one or two local governments in Western Australia have designated bush fire prone areas under their Local Planning Scheme, although several have implemented bush fire management plans for new subdivisions. The designation of bush fire prone areas as power in legislation (e.g. under a Local Planning Scheme) would give power to enforce compliance with the bush fire provisions of the Building Code of Australia and AS 3959.

There is a responsibility by all levels of government to maximise the safety of volunteer fire fighters through enforcing adequate clearing around buildings, road sides and property entry ways to enable adequate access, defence strategies and retreat during a bushfire.

Improved minimum standards for defendable space around buildings (whether existing or new) must be developed and enforced in accordance to the level of risk to bushfire, irrespective of whether they are in a designated bushfire prone area. Safety of residents and emergency services personnel (in the event of fire) must be of paramount consideration.

Similarly standards for road reserve maintenance and clearing for bushfire prevention, mitigation and response must be developed at a state level, with priority given to the protection of human life. The road reserves must be of sufficient width to enable the parking and passing of numerous emergency services vehicles; an issue identified by volunteers in the Kelmscott-Roleystone fire.

- 3. The actions that can and should be taken by landowners, residents and tenants in relation to bushfire risk management including undertaking vegetation clearance, operation of evaporative air-conditioners and storage and/or removal of hazardous inflammable material surrounding their dwellings and buildings. This should include consideration of associated enforcement regimes and penalties.**

Given the systemic shift in society away from self responsibility, there is an apparent need for greater education, as well as stricter legislation and enforcement, for standards and activities related to bush fire risk management.

Designation of bush fire prone areas as power in legislation would result in forced compliance with AS 3959, ensuring that safety measures associated with building standards and evaporative air conditioners are mandated.

Enforcement of greater clearances around buildings and greater penalties for non compliance will enhance the safety of fire fighters.

- 4. The adequacy and effectiveness of information and communication campaigns and mechanisms, including systems for alerting residents in relation to the fire or potential fires.**

The “tree change” has seen overseas and urban/city residents move into fire prone areas with little understanding of the potential for, and impact of, bushfires.

Improved educational strategies for newcomers, existing residents and absentee land owners are essential to developing awareness and understanding of the risks and consequences of bush fires. Instilling an understanding of the importance of preparing themselves and their properties for a bushfire is crucial; it is difficult to comprehend the ferocity of bushfires and vulnerability of homes and people without experience. Many people have unrealistic expectations of the availability of professional support and services (volunteer and career), and do not appreciate that fire appliances may not be available or able to protect their property in the event of a major fire.

Mandating risk warnings for properties in bush fire prone areas prior to a sales contract being entered into may go some way to facilitating early awareness. Pre knowledge of the level of risk of bush fire will enable the potential purchaser to consider both the appropriateness of the property for their needs and the appropriateness of existing/proposed building design and construction for the area.

The compulsion for property vendors and real estate agents to provide clear written warnings to potential purchasers, prior to any agreements being entered into, that the property is in a bush fire prone area will undoubtedly result in better preparedness, reduced loss of property and possibly lives, more affordable insurance and greater community resilience.

There is evidence that the Western Australian community (both rural and urban) does not fully understand the intent and implications of the imposition of a Total

Fire Ban. A public education strategy for Total Fire Bans needs to be developed to educate all sectors of the community on what activities are prohibited during a Total Fire Ban, and the potential for the prohibited activities to cause fire (e.g. vehicle movement, hot works etc). It is considered that the terminology "Total Fire Ban" is inappropriate and misleading, as its intent is more complex than implied by the wording.

There is a need for caution in relation to the utilisation of bans, warnings and alerts, as the community will very likely ignore warning and restriction systems that are not relevant to the actual conditions. For example, the imposition of a Total Fire Ban on rural and agricultural industries has significant practical and financial implications, particularly when imposed from midnight to midnight, and will undoubtedly be ignored if implemented on days when the actual conditions do not warrant it.

Inaccurate forecasting is occurring because the weather forecast districts are too large, and the conditions in the eastern portion of a district or sub district can vary considerably from that experienced in the western portion. The forecast grassland fire index is developed on only one set of forecast data, frequently resulting in inappropriate warnings for other parts of the district.

For the Extreme Weather Section of the Bureau of Meteorology to effectively and accurately implement Total Fire Bans and other fire weather warnings, greater resources must be provided such that weather districts can be more appropriately allocated. The lack of resources is exacerbated when extreme fire weather conditions are forecast in the south of the State at the same time as tropical storms/cyclones in the north.

5. Improvements that can be made in relation to the coordination of activities across all levels of government, including with volunteer groups.

Coordination of planning and activities by the key agencies (Local Government, FESA, DEC and Volunteer Brigades/Units) is critical to the improvement of prevention and response to wildfire.

Appropriate and accessible training of volunteers has been identified as a key area for improvement, particularly for higher level training such as Incident Management Levels 2 and 3. Whilst it is documented in Westplan Bushfire that Incident Management Teams are to be multi-agency and include personnel with local knowledge, appropriately experienced volunteers who have indicated a willingness to become incident controllers need to be provided with flexible training opportunities (split or extended courses offered on weekends/evenings etc). Having such qualified volunteers will not only support the fire fighters in their combat roles and ensure that there are sufficient qualified personnel for extended or multiple incidents; they also provide valuable contributions to enhance the skills of other volunteers during training and prescribed burning.

It is also essential that key personnel (volunteers and staff from across the agencies) are provided with opportunities to assist with incident management (e.g. as scribes), as such experiences will provide valuable learning opportunities.

Shared training, planning and participation in activities amongst the agencies will result in more effective fire prevention and response. Such cooperation has been demonstrated by the collaborative efforts of Bremer Bay Volunteer Emergency Service Unit, the Shire of Ravensthorpe, FESA and DEC. At the instigation of the Unit, a Committee was formed to identify strategies for improved community awareness and preparedness (particularly for absentee land owners), improved water supplies, improved access to high fire risk properties (mainly UCL and Reserves) and strategic hazard reduction burning. This has resulted in a well co-ordinated and effective bush fire mitigation program, as well as improved response capacity, attributable to the effective communication, mutual respect, shared learning and collaboration between the agencies. A DVD and CD of the Bremer Bay project are attached for information.

The importance of hands on training of volunteers during hazard reduction burning cannot be overestimated, and it is important that the valuable opportunities for them to work together with Fire Managers during such burns are not lost.

Operational issues specific to the Roleystone fire that have been identified by volunteers include communication, coordination and welfare. These have all been submitted to the Major Incident Review into the Perth fires being undertaken by Stuart Ellis on behalf of FESA.

From:
To:
Subject: Residents' submission
Date: Thursday, 7 April 2011 7:02:46 PM

Good day Sir.

As a resident of Clifton Hills affected by the fires, and having a broad range of contracting and business experience, I respectfully tender the following comments for your consideration.

1) SMS warning system.

I had no knowledge of the systems availability – and neither did I receive any form of message from FESA. We have some 5 mobile telephones which operate from or are domiciled at this residence, and none received such a text. If such a system exists, I suggest that residents are made aware of the facility and how it operates, in order to understand and process the message when it does arrive.

I do not support the criticisms I have heard regarding the timely dissemination of any warning, given that texts are frequently delivered substantially late and FESA do not control the technology.

There does not appear to be any way of registering to receive such warnings.

2) Exclusion of Civilians from the affected area.

Whilst the tragedies of the Victorian fires may well have been on the mind of the fire control officer, the strategy of excluding residents and hopeful amateur fire fighters seems to neglect the psychological pressure and responsibility the average Australian male embraces to defend the family home.

Such exclusion invites and empowers resentment in the event that a home may actually be suspected to have been lost due to a lack of attendance.

Many residents who did remain felt that their presence and efforts did in fact save the family home.

3) Selection / exclusion of volunteers to assist:

It was a matter of incredulity amongst the country volunteers that brigades were brought in from afar, whilst trained, able and available equipment from closer brigades were passed by. In my case, I was returning from my farm with late knowledge of the fire, when upon my arrival, I was prevented from entering my street by Police, despite the fact that I had a fully equipped fast attack fire fighting unit at my home. The officers followed orders, however, no facility was offered, such as the contact details for the fire control officer who may well have accepted the offer of support.

4) FESA can be perceived to act “Gung Ho “

It is my observation from previous events, outside the scope of this enquiry, that FESA can be “Gung Ho” a suggestion that will not be welcome, however I can cite at least one instance where I believe this did happen, and as on this occasion- available, appropriate assistance was rejected. In that instance, the individual in need of rescue died, largely due to the affects of prolonged entrapment. The perception I have, is that FESA does not necessarily have the training for every emergency, however, it appears to be the culture to monopolize the efforts, or the “business” of rescue unable to consider lateral ideas to solve a mission. Whilst my perception may ultimately have less

weight than I think, the fact that a perception can be held suggests that a review of that culture may be beneficial.

5) Management plans:

A great deal is being said of management plans, focusing on fuel reduction etc., however, I suggest that consideration be given to identifying a high risk area, and apply codes such as “class one fire risk”. Warnings can be issued relating to that coding. It also would allow councils to demand fire management strategies in the various risk classes, such as wider fire breaks, greater obligations for fuel reduction on private property.

6) Private risk management

could be required of residents who dwell in the classified areas, including the pre-determination of exit points, and plans in order to prepare the homeowners for a risk cut-off point and exit pathway.

7) Community assets and resources

could be registered and available to the fire control officer for utilization . Groups who possess a control structure, fitness and discipline – such as football and rugby could be encouraged to register their availability – enabling a labour resource where appropriate.

8) Trades / skills

should be considered for pre-registration outside of the current asset portfolio, such as demolition contractors for building collapse.

9) Recognition of responders :

Where an event is classed by the State government as , say a “Natural Disaster” like the tragic Victorian fires, or indeed these at Kelmscott, perhaps a medal be struck and awarded to all responders – “the Kelmscott fires badge” or the “Aceh medal” much along military lines.

Whilst everything I have suggested may not be popular, I respectfully submit these comments to the commissioner and thank you for your consideration.

Stephen David John Marshall

Director Marshall Exports P/L
SwanFire Investments P/L
Waste Stream Management P/L
Aviation Loss adjuster
20 years Demolition Contractor.

SUBMISSION TO THE PERTH HILLS BUSHFIRE FEBRUARY 2011 REVIEW

This submission is forwarded by M.H. Sparkman, a retired engineer who lives in the hills escarpment residential suburb of Lesmurdie in the Shire Council of Kalamunda. The fire fuel loads and bushfire hazards in this area are considered to be grossly excessive.

The Fundamental Problem

Excessive residential lot sizes (2,000 metres and larger) occupied by residents who do not or cannot maintain fuel loads at a safe level. This situation is abetted by Councils neglecting their statutory duty of care to neighbouring property owners by failing to direct remedial action. Further the Kalamunda Shire does not keep fuel loads on its own properties, reserves and street verges at a safe and satisfactory level.

Despite the general view, and the Terms of Reference, this is not only a Perth hills problem. It exists anywhere hobby farm subdivisions exist, as demonstrated by recent fires at Clifton and in the Rockingham/Mandurah area.

Kalamunda Shire Council policy is for a minimum lot size of 2,000 m unless a deep sewer service is available. This policy is accepted by The Planning Commission in its consideration of subdivision proposals.

The situation is often compounded by strict council limitations on removing endemic vegetation from any part of the lot other than the building envelope. There are subdivisions in Bedforddale in the Armadale Kelmscott Council with this restriction.

I have no objection to large blocks or hobby farms provided the owners recognize, and Councils enforce their obligations to safe guard their neighbours.

Unintended Consequences

It has been policy in this state for decades that a sub divider must give up about 10% of the land for public open space. Such land is generally vested in the local govt. which in many instances does not want the land and does not have the resources to develop/maintain it. Often the land made over is unattractive for building being too steep, too rocky, of inefficient shape, too wet in winter or suffers from other undesirable features. As a result the Kalamunda Shire is dotted with undeveloped areas of neglected bushland in fully developed residential areas.

Consideration should be given to restrict this requirement to large subdivisions over 50 hectares in size. Consideration should also be given to converting some existing reserves to a residential zoning.

The Kalamunda Culture

“Kalamunda” claimed to be an aboriginal term meaning “a home in the forest” has been adopted in a cultural sense by many residents and Kalamunda Shire Councillors. This has led to an almost paranoid obsession to preserve all trees regardless of circumstances and for pressure to plant more. The Shire makes tree seedlings available free to ratepayers every spring.

The Manager Parks and Gardens, who is also responsible for street verges, is not prepared to countenance removal of any tree, living or dead, regardless of the circumstances.

Many residents have no idea of the radiant heat that will be generated if their backyard catches fire.

There is a need for an independent review of inappropriate trees on private property and verges. Inappropriate because of location, species, height, flammability and numbers. A programme of tree removal should then be instituted. There would need to be a parallel action to modify the “Kalamunda culture”.

Fuel Reduction by Burning

Some years ago volunteer fire brigades were engaged throughout spring season carrying out burn offs both on private property and for the Shire. This was a substantial source of funds for equipment purchases and provided valuable training exercises for volunteers. This activity has virtually ceased and is not encouraged by Kalamunda Shire. Encouragement of weeds, smoke nuisance, ratepayer objections, limited opportunity and liability in the event of property damage are claimed as reasons for the dramatic reduction in this fuel reduction activity.

The Dept. of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has responsibility for maintenance of some large reserves and national parks that border on built up hills residential suburbs. The Dept. shows great reluctance in carrying out fuel reduction (prescribed) burns in proximity to residences. As well illustrated in its response to the Roleystone fire the Dept. rationalizes its lack of action by trotting out the well used excuses – unfavourable weather, smoke over Perth, and limited resources for failing to reach target quotas.

Greater pressure needs to be applied to DEC and Shires to actually meet fuel reduction targets and to ensure similar action on privately held land. It is suggested that auditing of bush fire safety on all land areas regardless of usage, and Shire Council administration of The Act be specifically included in State Auditor General's auditing schedules.

It would greatly assist if health and safety laws and regulations were clarified so as to ensure that properly equipped and trained organizations carrying out prescribed burns after taking due cognizance of weather conditions and forecasts, were not subject to potential legal liability or criminal prosecution in the event of a fire getting out of hand.

Evacuation

It is now fashionable to recommend/direct evacuation not only in the event of a local fire but in anticipation of a possible fire on catastrophic fire day ie. the night before! See FESA Pamphlet "Prepare, Act, Survive" V2:October 2010 p9. Note that under the four highest risk situations evacuation is recommended. Further, forced evacuation and physical prohibition on residents entering evacuated areas are now the norm. This policy is an affront to human nature and individuals will undertake all sorts of subterfuges to circumvent it. To see desperate men handcuffed and taken away in paddy wagons is not a pretty sight.

Such a policy is an admission that the fire fighting authority, despite the fancy equipment now available, does not expect to and cannot extinguish the fire or contain it within reasonable bounds. The FESA statement the day after the Roleystone fire says it all; "The fire is out of control and burning in several directions."

This evacuation policy now places on the relevant authority a duty of care to arrange evacuation eg. residents with no transport, schools and work places. Recent evacuation orders have involved substantial parts of suburbs rather than the immediate surrounds. Chaotic traffic conditions and obstruction of fire fighters are obvious potential outcomes.

I am not convinced that the Kalamunda Shire, which claims to have a "Plan", could effectively carry out an evacuation say of a 400 child school in a timely and safe manner. Major building occupants in multi storey CBD buildings and industrial enterprises are required to have, to communicate to staff and to regularly practice evacuation plans. Residents in Lesmurdie are not privy to the Shire plan. They are not even advised where identified safe evacuation points are – they are to be advised "at the time", in case they go to the wrong site.

Darling Range Scarp Reserves and Fire Breaks

In an endeavour to preserve the escarpment as natural bush as seen from Perth, a series of nature reserves, national parks and regional reserves were established, some after urban subdivisions had been approved and established. In some cases both sides of urban streets are reserves and there are isolated residences with reserve land on three sides. There is no clear demarcation to facilitate prescribed burns or establishment of consistent and continuous fire breaks.

In some areas such reserves have no fire break at all.

A new development is the specification for new hills subdivisions of a substantial break of some 50 to 100 metres to separate the subdivision from surrounding natural bush. A recent subdivision in Brigadoon is an example.

It would be of great benefit if such a wide break be retrospectively established along the Lesmurdie and Kalamunda sections of scarp reserves. Currently there are sections where not even standard breaks are provided. There is currently a great risk of a strong hot westerly wind sweeping a fire rapidly up the scarp gullies and into urban areas with catastrophic results.

Fire Danger Ratings

A recent change to danger ratings has seen a new rating of “catastrophic” This is a bastardization of the language and could be confusing. On a continuum of rating from low- moderate, “extreme “ is the ultimate rating. “Catastrophic” is an outcome not a measure of risk. A resident who loses his home under low- moderate conditions experiences a catastrophic result.

Fire Fighting Performance A Solution??

Why have fires in built up areas become so unmanageable? Whatever the cause, fires will start and some will be on high risk weather days. The only variable is the fuel load so the solution is clear- reduce the load until there is a better chance of confining and extinguishing the fire and keeping losses to an acceptable level.

House fires in Perth suburbs very rarely spread to neighbouring houses. Even factory fires do not often spread beyond the factory site.

Fire fighting organizations need to set some objectives for fires in fire prone areas eg. extinguish a fire under the worst conditions in two hours. Applying this objective to specific areas in their responsibility and applying a weighting for other variables such as access problems, would give an estimate of damage in terms of area burnt, homes lost, livestock killed and human casualties. If these levels of loss are considered unacceptable then reduction of fuel loads until the assessed likely losses are acceptable, is mandated. Given the omissions of local govt. in controlling fuel loads perhaps this assessment should be done by others. At least a regular independent audit is needed.

Conclusion

It is respectfully recommended that the Review give due consideration, based on the issues raised above, to finding a need for;

1. More effective and timely administration of the statutory requirements of the Act by local govt. Specific audit of performance of this responsibility be included in formal local govt. audit reports.

2. A reduction in minimum residential lot sizes to 1,000 m or less.

3. A substantial fire break, at least 50 m wide be established along the Darling Range scarp to provide a safer and more substantial separation from residential areas.

4. Formal performance objectives for fire fighting organizations be established in terms of the acceptable level of damage and losses arising from any fire. These targets to be used as a regular test of the extent of fuel reduction requirements in specific areas.

5. Conversion of some small, undeveloped reserves in residential areas be converted to residential zoning.

6. A review of the legal liabilities arising from escape of fires during prescribed and other burning activities.

7. Discontinuing use of the fire danger rating of “catastrophic “

8. Reducing the level of mass evacuations triggered by recent fire events.

M.H SPARKMAN

7/4/2011

Anne Gordon

March 31, 2011

Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review
197St. George's Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have lived at the above address for 24 years on a 2.1 hectare bush block, which is classified as Special Rural. Even though I was not directly affected by the February 2011 bushfires, I have a vested interest and there are a few relevant comments I wish to make.

BURNING OFF

I feel that all landowners in a fire prone area have a responsibility to ensure that fuel loads on their property do not build up to a dangerous level. I attempt to do a fuel reduction burn on a section of my property every year, on a rotational basis. I do not feel that the Armadale City Council has been understanding or helpful at all with this. Firstly, burning off can only be done on one day of a weekend. The majority of people work, and so the only time they can burn off their properties is on the weekend. One day is not enough, especially if it rains. Because of this, often a permit is required. The Armadale City Council make this very difficult, in that one has to collect the permit from the Armadale City Council office on a certain day, at a certain time. Why can't they be mailed to the person requesting the permit? This is particularly difficult for those who work away from the Armadale district. In fact, a neighbour told me that the rangers department said in 2010 they were trying to discourage burning off and/or burning piles of rubbish.

FIREBREAKS

These are required to be cleared by 30th November every year. My firebreaks are always clear; however my neighbours' are not. No 24 never clear theirs. To my knowledge, they have never been approached regarding the state of their firebreaks. I don't mean to sound sanctimonious, but this annoys me because I am diligent about maintaining firebreaks and the rest of my property.

TRAIL BIKES

Trail bikes are allowed to be ridden here on private property with the consent of the owner, even though Simons Drive is a residential area. With the ease at which the February fires started from a spark from an angle grinder, I am very concerned that a spark from a trail bike could cause a fire. I feel the state or local governments are being very irresponsible allowing trail bikes to be ridden in a fire prone area. Surely the

government could provide an area away from residential areas where these anti-social types could ride their bikes, at their own risk.

VERGE COLLECTION

We recently had a verge collection in our street. My neighbour at No 20 had put a refrigerator out on the verge for collection. It was a hot day, the gases in the refrigerator must have expanded, and their fridge caught fire. If the fridge had been placed on a verge full of leaf litter, that could have had disastrous consequences. Wouldn't it be better if verge collections were done in the cooler months?

CANNING MILLS ROAD, ETC

Shouldn't fuel reduction burns be conducted in the bush around these natural bush areas when there are residential properties nearby? Whose responsibility is this – DEC or local government? Was this not done because the asthma foundation is such a powerful lobby group? Why should people's lives and properties be put at risk because of them? It will be interesting to see if they or DEC are sued for property loss because the bush was not maintained in a safe manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'A. Gordon'.

(A. GORDON))



Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review

Submission to the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review

Submissions should be submitted electronically (preferred) to:

[Redacted]

or posted to:

Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review
Locked Bag 10, Cloisters Square
PERTH WA 6850

Note: All submissions received will be made available on the Inquiry's website. People wishing to make a confidential submission should make this clear at the time of lodgement and the Inquiry will not publish those submissions. However, people should be aware that whilst every endeavour will be made to ensure confidentiality, there is a possibility that such submissions might be released in accordance with the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.

Contact Details

Name:	Colin James
Address:	
Email address:	
Telephone number:	

Organisation Details (Where Applicable)

Is this submission presented on behalf of an organisation:	No
If yes, name of organisation:	
Position in organisation:	

I write to you and your committee in an individual capacity, but to establish my credibility to make an informed comment on the above inquiry I advise that I am currently W.A.L.G.A's representative on the F.E.S.A Bushfire Consultative Committee ; a Councillor with the Shire of Mundaring for 11 years with specific interests in Emergency Services; and active volunteer bushfire fighter with the F.E.S.A Air

Operations unit, member of the Darlington Volunteer Bushfire Brigade for 30 years and also coordinator of the Darlington Bushfire Ready Action Group.

Response to Terms of Reference

Although not specifically addressing each of the Terms of Reference I do submit a submission based on the adequacy of current preventative measures and improvements that can be made in relationship to the coordination of activities across all levels of government.

I have expressed at numerous times, even back to November 2004, in a submission to the Auditor General for Western Australia on his report "Responding to Major Bushfires", to the Chairman, Community Development and Justice Committee, 2006, on their "Inquiry into Fire and Emergency Services Legislation", my concerns on the lack of follow up to Post Incident Analysis Reports undertaken through FESA or Local Governments after major fires have occurred.

In the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission they noted, under the heading "Bushfire Warnings-the well trodden path", that from reports in 1984 through to 2006, the same message discussed but no action taken. The WA Auditor-Generals Report 2004 'Responding to Major Bushfires' also referred to the lack of follow up in PIA's conducted.

I have noted in reviewing PIA's since the 1997 Woorooloo fire, that PIA's where undertaken, there is a common denominators in all of them—Community Safety and fire information; Incident Management team performance; Agency liaisons---- similar items in which your terms of reference refer to. Why is this----because, in my opinion, there is a failure to follow up and ensue where undertaken, and actions noted that these are then audited after 12 months to ensure we do not have our own "Royal Commission", and it is also said—"well-they talked about it".

In reviewing the Perth Hills Bushfires, and their devastating impact on the community I believe by reviewing previous PIA's for fires in these localities you will find possibly numerous actions noted but not followed through with, and how they may have had an impact on the recent disaster.