

**SUBMISSION TO PERTH HILLS BUSHFIRE REVIEW**

**FROM**

**THE FRIENDS OF ELLIS BROOK VALLEY (INC)**

**31/01/2011**

The Friends of Ellis Brook Valley (Inc) have been working in the Ellis Brook Catchment for 18 years. We have a good knowledge of the prevailing conditions in this bushland area.

For some years we have been aware of the ever increasing fuel loading in a large part of the Catchment. The area we refer to is mainly on and above the Darling Scarp and between Ellis Brook and a line running east from the eastern end of Gosnells Road East. This very high fuel loading has come about by the development of a very dense understory in the area. These areas have not been subject to fire, controlled or otherwise for an estimated 15 years. This area is of very high and significant conservation value. Residential property exists on the western and eastern boundaries.

We are of the opinion that in order to prevent future disastrous fires, a controlled burning regime should be applied. This should adopt autumn burning following the Mosaic Burning method. In April 2009 we raised our concerns with DEC who we understood were responsible for fuel reduction in the area. We attach a copy of the letter we sent to DEC. Despite some follow up phone calls we never got a reply. The City of Gosnells have a Fire Management Plan that endorses the need for a Controlled Mosaic Burning Program. It appears however that they do not have sufficient funding to carry out more than basic track maintenance. While we refer to specific area in the Perth Hills it is likely that there are numerous other areas where high fuel loadings exist.

In our view The State Government should provide funding to land managers for fire hazard reduction. The Land Managers should then be required to carry out regular assessments of fuel loading and other risks and implement Hazard Reduction Regimes . Autumn Mosaic Burning regimes should be in practise for all land managers of bushland in the Perth Hills



John Bowler (President)

Mr Sneeuwjagt

3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009

**Re Fire Control at Elliss Brook Valley, Martin**

Dear Sir.

We are concerned about the levels of high fuel loading in parts of the Ellis Brook area. It has been many years since some areas have been burnt and consequently in our view any future wild fire would be very damaging, dangerous and difficult to contain. The area of our particular concern is shown on the attached map.

The fire situation was discussed at our last meeting. We feel that there should be a programme of fuel reduction autumn burns with selected areas burnt each year. Our initial contact re this issue was with the City of Gosnells but we understand that DEC is responsible for fire control and controlled burning in this area.

Can you please advise us of the following:-

- Are any fuel reduction burns scheduled for the Ellis Brook, Martin area?
- Is there a current written fire management plan or strategy for the Ellis Brook, Martin area?

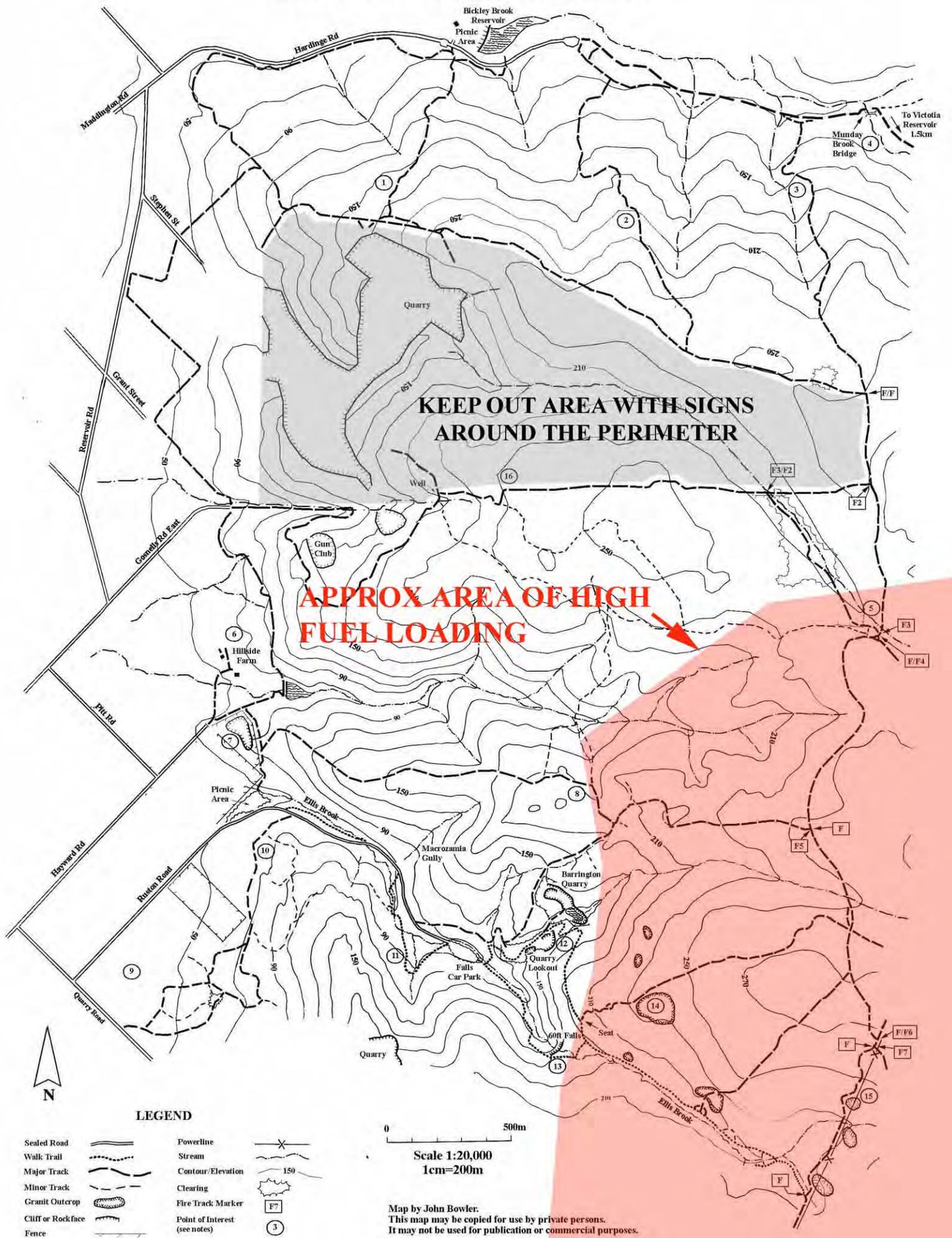
Thanking you for your attention .

Yours Sincerely.

John Bowler- President. Friend of Ellis Brook Valley (Inc)

# ELLIS BROOK VALLEY TO BICKLEY RESERVOIR

## Tracks and Trails Suitable for Walkers



**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**

<b>Name:</b>	Steven Dobson
<b>Address:</b>	
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<b>Telephone number:</b>	

**Organisation Details (Where Applicable)**

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

**Response to Terms of Reference**

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

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

- 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.**

No Comment.

- 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.**

No Comment.

- 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.**

No Comment.

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

I submit that there is a complete lack of coordination and respect for volunteers by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA (FESA) with regards to volunteer bush fire brigades (BFB's).

#### **AUTHOR AND BRIGADE BIOGRAPHY**

I am the Captain of Jandakot Volunteer Bushfire Brigade and have been an officer since 2000 holding positions of authority including Secretary, Training Officer. My current appointment is the Captain and Fire Control Officer, gazetted by the City of Cockburn.

Jandakot Volunteer Bushfire Brigade was established in 1967 and lies within the City of Cockburn. Our primary response area is that gazetted as Emergency Services Levy zone three (ESL3), and includes the localities of Jandakot and Banjup. This area consists primarily of 5 acre hobby farms, local government controlled reserves and Department of Conservation and Environment (DEC) controlled reserves. Of particular note is the high value of rural hobby farms in Banjup and Jandakot, with the average property prices well exceeding \$1,000,000.

A serious threat to fire management in the localities of Banjup and Jandakot, is the lack of reticulated mains water. All rural properties in Jandakot and Banjup are self sufficient and need to provide their own potable water, normally by rainwater collection or bore

water. This means that any firefighting response, be it to a bushfire or structural fire, is a challenge given the fire appliances are limited to the water they carry on board.

Jandakot Volunteer Bushfire Brigade fire station is located on the corner of Liddelow Rd, and Oxley Rd, Banjup. It has 65 firefighter members and approximately 25 social members. We have a cadet training program linked to the Lakelands Senior High School and train over 25 cadets each year.

Our current fire appliances are:

1 x 12,000 litre bulk water tanker (referred to as Jandakot 12.2)

2 x Toyota Landcruiser light tankers (referred to as Jandakot LT1 and Jandakot LT2)

1 x welfare trailer with cooking and refreshment provisions

## **ISSUES WITH FESA MANAGEMENT OF JANDAKOT BRIGADE**

### **FESA Communications (Comcen).**

FESA communications regularly turnover staff and have difficulty in attracting skilled workers who can work under pressure in an emergency response environment. This is worsened by the fact that COMCEN is managed by career FRS officers. This means that civilians are being managed by FRS officers who are used to working in a paramilitary environment.

Regular issues with COMCEN include:

- Wrong brigades turned out to incidents.
- Not obtaining sufficient information from emergency 000 callers.
- Wrong resources deployed for the type of incident

COMCEN have developed a document called a MARS form (Mobilization Anomaly Reporting). This form is completed by the brigade who is aggrieved and then sent to FESA Comcen, where the duty supervisor will investigate the alleged wrong. There is a massive conflict of interest in this instance, as the person who makes the error in the first case, gets to cover up for their error. It is hard to believe that a public safety organisation allows its own officers to investigate their own mistakes, but it is the case with regards to problems with brigade turnouts.

COMCEN being a primarily FRS based communications centre, do not have sufficient knowledge of the capabilities or environment that bush fire brigades operate in. It is not uncommon, for multiple FRS brigades to be turned out to a bushfire on the edge of a bushfire brigade zone whilst the bushfire brigade is not called to assist. This is ludicrous as it poses a massive opportunity risk whilst the FRS brigades are engaged in fighting bushfires, they are leaving a huge hole in the response capabilities in the event an incident of their expertise occurs, such as a structure fire or road crash.

It is a regular problem for all bushfire brigades where FRS brigades wrongly attend incidents inside bushfire brigade zoning (ESL3). COMCEN state each time this occurs

that it is due to the caller providing a street and then advising there is a fire. If that street is inside or adjacent to ESL1 then FRS will be turned out. However it is blatantly obvious in some cases there is a tendency to turnout FRS appliances to bushfires even if they are on the same road, and traverses through ESL1 and ESL3 boundaries.

Previous rumours have been circulated that the United Firefighters Union (UFU) has always ensured that FRS brigades are turned out instead of bushfire brigades, in an attempt to increase the fire call statistics for FRS brigades, and therefore increase the likelihood of new career stations, and increasing the membership base for the UFU.

Of note with COMCEN is that on the day of the Roleystone/Kelmscott incident, the Operations Officer Don Johnston called for a strike team of bushfire brigade appliances to attend the incident. These include bushfire brigades from the Perth South Coastal Zone. These appliances were mobilized and very near to the actual incident, when they were diverted in convoy to another incident in the Canning Regional Park, Ferndale. This incident was only a bushfire with no property threat and the appliances that turned out were not utilised in full, ie too many appliances attended the incident.

#### **Attempted removal of suitable appliances from the Jandakot Brigade:**

FESA are intending to move resources from the Jandakot Volunteer Bushfire Brigade, which will lead to the eventual closure of Jandakot Brigade.

FESA are building a collocation building in suburban ESL1 Cockburn Central, designed to house South Coogee BFB and Cockburn SES. City of Cockburn council voted in 2006 to keep Jandakot BFB and not merge with South Coogee. Jandakot BFB is in ESL3 and is surrounded by hundreds of 5 acre properties in Banjup / Jandakot which are zoned by the state govt as groundwater protected. Ie this means never to be developed.

FESA have at no stage since 2006, consulted the brigade or the shire councillors (including Mayor) with this planned reallocation of resources. The first I heard of this planned move of resources and closure of station, was when the local community residents group contacted me.

If the Bulk Water Tanker resource is moved to the collocation building in the middle of suburbia, then Jandakot Brigade will become defunct as the remaining Jandakot LT's cannot operate in Banjup / Jandakot rural without the tanker. This would cause our fire statistics to reduce and lead to imminent closure.

Jandakot Brigade is one of the strongest in the metro area with over 65 members. As opposed to South Coogee (where the collocation is to be) who only have 20 members. We have over 20 members with HR licences to drive the tanker. South Coogee would be lucky to have half this number. There are hundreds of other supporting reasons to keep our brigade at the present location and keep the tanker where it remains.

I have the full support of the 65 Jandakot members (and their families), the Banjup Residents Group and Aubin Grove Residents Association. I have no doubt in attracting full support from the community and media for us to remain in Banjup and to keep the bulk water tanker.

Moving a valuable fire resource such as a tanker from the current location will jeopardise fire turnout times and therefore puts the residents of Cockburn and other shires in grave danger.

Cockburn Councillors have all personally supported Jandakot BFB remaining in situ and the tanker staying at Jandakot. They too are surprised by this letter from FESA and are seeking an explanation.

I challenged our CBFCO / CESM Don Johnston upon receiving the information that Jandakot tanker was to be moved from a rural location to suburbia. He advised he was aware for some time that the tanker would be moved from Jandakot BFB and had to maintain confidentiality to FESA.

There exists a massive lack of cooperation and underhanded tactics by FESA when dealing with any consultation issues with volunteer bushfire brigades, and the local government elected members.



## Submission to the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review

Name:	Mr. Eddie Liddelow
Address:	
Email Address:	
Telephone number:	

Is this submission presented on behalf of an organization:	Yes/No
If yes, name of organization:	Fire For Life Inc.
Position in organization:	President

Thank you for this opportunity to be able to submit this submission. Each of the Terms of Reference is addressed as follows:

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

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

Currently, this state has a world recognised organisation in the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) which is responsible for the maintenance of our forests. It's prescribed burning practices on face value are reasonably good, but there are areas of concern.

These areas of concern are:

#### **a. Metropolitan smoke concerns**

There have been many times in the past where the DEC has been unable to conduct burns within the Metropolitan areas due to the concern that the public will react adversely causing a public relations problem for DEC due to the possibility of the metropolitan area being affected by smoke.

Additionally, prescribed burning in the country areas can be hindered for the same public relation reasons, due to atmospheric conditions causing smoke to move towards the Perth Region.

DEC needs to qualify its role as forest manager and note these smoke concerns, but take a more active role in prescribed burning for the betterment of the forests. But above all, they must conduct the required prescribed burning for the protection of human life and property.

Some years ago it was noted by this organisation in the past, on days of high forest smoke over the metropolitan areas, that there were no additional smoke affected

admissions to the hospitals. Fire For Life Inc. had conducted enquiries into this area of concern.

It is recommended that the Inquiry conducts formal investigation into the effects that smoke has had on the public attendance to hospitals caused by prescribed burning smoke.

**b. Viniculture**

Over the past few years the vigneronns have raised their concerns regarding the effect that prescribed burn smoke has had on their Vintages. It is noted that the smoke does have an effect on their vintages.

As recently as Monday the 11<sup>th</sup> April this year, DEC's prescribed burning regime was negatively influenced by the grape harvesting in the south west.

It is recognised that the vigneronns have a right to harvest their vintages at their optimal timing for their income, but the consideration of life and the property of other persons must also be considered.

One must wonder why vigneronns planted their crops in a bushfire smoke prone area and that they consider their income has priority over all other people's lives and property.

The vigneronns have recently as a collective, taken DEC through the courts with a view to preventing prescribed burns from taking place unless it suits their vintages. It must be noted that there are various vegetations (such as Karri forest) that can only be prescribed burnt in a certain window of opportunity. This being as these types of forests have to dry out in the understory growth to burn. Too wet it will not burn and too dry, and devastation occurs. It just so happens that the suitable times for these types of prescribed burns occurs during some times of vintage harvests.

Through the courts last year, DEC was given a clear mandate over the vigneronns to conduct prescribed burning.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recognises that DEC has the clear mandate over the vigneronns to conduct prescribed burning.

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

This area is of concern to us in that people are able to build residences in areas subject to the dangers of Bushfires. We note the following:

**a. Development Access**

Residential and industrial area development approvals are currently been granted to developers whose residential plans only provide the one access route to their development.

This can lead to people being trapped inside a hazardous area. It also prevents access to a hazardous area for the purpose of hazard control.

It is recommended that more than one access/exit for residential/industrial areas are recommended for a change of law to recognise this.

**b. Street Numbering**

Building laws require tweaking to ensure that a standard street numbering system is in place to standardise the street numbering location, size and visibility of residential locations. This would ensure timely responses and actions in the event of an emergency.

It is recommended that a standard street numbering system be developed to standardise the numbers for location, size and visibility for residential/industrial areas, are recommended by this inquiry for a change of law to recognise this.

**c. Burn Regime**

Currently, DEC has a prescribed burn regime that recommends a total amount of hectares that should be prescribed burnt each year to maintain life and property protection along with the maintenance of the forest. This target would in theory, maintain a suitable rotational prescribed burn process for all the forest with their relevant intervals.

What occurs in reality is that areas burnt by Wildfires during any given target year are added to the overall total area that was achieved. This system may on face value appear that DEC has achieved its target but does not indicate whether or not the targeted areas were of prescribed burnt.

Therefore, large areas of forest are being left for longer intervals between prescribed burns. It has a roll on effect each year increasing the danger to the public and property.

Additionally, when these areas are ignited through natural or unnatural causes, with or without authorisation from the relevant authorities, devastation occurs through the intensity of the wildfire due to the unwarranted ground litter build-up.

It is recommended that the inquiry recommend that areas burnt through Wildfire are not included in the prescribed burn targets.

**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.**

Through neglect or sheer ignorance, property owners or tenants place themselves and others at risk by their poor hazard reduction risks around their homes. In some cases, the Local Governments should be taking more action or developing laws if required to enforce hazard reductions. Some points considered are:

**a. Residential Fires**

Most residential fires resulting from Bushfire actually start from the inside of the house then burn out. Embers are allowed easy access to within the roof cavities (Cilfs – area between the roof and the ceiling).

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department to develop design changes to prevent the entry of Embers into the Cilf.

**b. Native Vegetation**

There is a current practice that promotes the use of native (Australian) vegetation to be grown around houses due to their water wise properties. Native vegetation is characteristic of being highly flammable and by its nature, creates a huge amount of debris under the plants. These plants are not ‘plant and forget’ as most people would be led to believe.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department for an educational program as to the dangers of native vegetation with a view to its inherent adverse qualities when it is not maintained correctly.

**c. Mulch – Ember Attacks**

In past fires, Ember Attacks cause fires in areas not considered by the users around their homes. This is the use of mulch. Most are flammable material and are not advertised as such. The result of these fuels can lead to the ignition of other fuel sources such as poorly maintained shrub undergrowth.

Mulches can also significantly contribute to ember attacks with high winds.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department for educational program as to the flammable qualities of some mulches and have as appropriate, suitable warning labeling on the mulch packaging

**d. Vegetation Placement**

The placement of vegetation near (within 1.5 metres) of windows is a dangerous practice as when the plant ignites, the resultant heat causes windows to crack and shatter apart.

This allows flame and embers to enter the house to ignite curtains or other flammable material, resulting in the destruction of the house.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department for an educational program as to dangers of planting vegetation close to windows.

**e. By-Laws/Hazardous Material**

Some Local Governments have by-laws that allow them to take action against owners or tenants to remove fire hazards. Some have the by-laws but do not enforce them.

Sometimes the cost to a Local Government will deter court actions due to their financial state.

There needs to be some balance here, but examples of obvious fire fuel hazards that require action to be taken against home owners or tenants are in the areas of long dry grass, unkept native vegetation and flammable materials such as piles of old fuel drums to name just a few.

Some local governments have an infringement system that allows for easier enforcement of laws. It is our thoughts that all local governments should have such a system.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends across the board of local governments to develop standard laws for the control of potential fuel hazards with a range of suitable penalties to suit. It is also recommended that an infringement system be adopted in all local governments to make to enforcement of offences easier to enforce.

**f. Penalties**

Penalties should be increased as a major deterrent against fire risks. Apart from fires causing damage thereby increasing insurance costs, we must not forget the hazards to fire fighters.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department the development of suitable penalties for the non maintenance of fuel hazard control.

**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.**

With all new warning system developments there are glitches. More recently this has been noted with the Perth Hills Bushfire with the use of Mobile Telephones using the SMS system.

Commenting on the Perth Hills Bushfires people expressed views were that they either received the SMS but nothing happened, they received the SMS but it was too late, or they never received an SMS. To draw the link here, the people's actions and views were that they were totally reliant upon the system as a whole and used it as a source of blame. People must be aware that the SMS system is in all reality, a support system only. People should not rely on it totally. Additionally, it should be noted that not all people own mobile phones, are in areas of no mobile phone coverage, or do not carry their mobile phone at all times.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department the development of an educational program to inform the public of the realities of the SMS system.

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

During bushfires across the state, there seems to always be some mishap due to lack of command and control. This was again brought to the fore during the Perth Hills Bushfire.

### **a. Control – Target Specific Guidelines**

As always, there are ambiguities as to who is in control and when the control of an incident should be elevated to a higher level. As has happened previously on many occasions, incident control has not been elevated until the incident is not being controlled.

There remains the problem. There are little or no formal specific guide lines for the handing over or the taking control of an incident. Most handovers are adhoc, and may be influenced by personnel conflict, urges of ‘power’ maintenance by individuals and/or the lack of ability of the controller at the time.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends to the relevant department the development of suitable *target specific* guidelines for the control of, or taking control of incidents.

### **b. Control – FESA’s Capability**

FESA’s ability of their capability to assume control of a Bushfire is in question. As of the moment, they do not have the experience to command a heightened level of Bushfire incident due to their lack of experience. Yes, they have a few persons who joined their organisation from DEC. But the others gained their qualifications from attending theory courses and have no or little practical experience.

It is noted that FESA can manage urban fire (without a major forest component) and industrial fires well. But their controls of major forest areas are in question until far more experience for them has been gained. Until that occurs, DEC should be the overall command and control organisation within the areas of major forest component.

It is recommended that the Inquiry recommends that DEC be in command and control of Bushfires in all areas which contain a major forest component.

(Signed)

E Liddelow

14 April 2011

*FIRE FOR LIFE Inc. is an incorporated body raised in March 2002 for the purpose of supporting prescribed burning with the aim "To promote and support increased burning with a view to return to traditional burn times, thus providing a healthy and safe environment for the plants, animals and birds who live there; for the people who visit the forests; and the properties that adjoin it, and to preserve the forests for future generations".*

*(Written by Bob Morgan and authorised by Eddie Liddelow)*

## **SUBMISSION TO THE PERTH HILLS BUSHFIRE FEBRUARY 2011 REVIEW**

### **Contact Details**

**Name: Vicki and Anthony Pietropiccolo**

**Address:**

**Email Address:**

**Telephone:**

### **Term of Reference 1.**

Our family has lived in the Kelmscott/Roleystone area for 30 years. For the last 21 years we have lived on a highly wooded block. Over the last thirty years we have seen bushfires all around us but they have rarely threatened lives and homes. The loss of homes over that period in this area could be counted on one hand. We have never seen the destruction that occurred in the recent Roleystone/Kelmscott fire.

So something has drastically changed. It may be that it is now a drier environment with reduced rainfall and that is causing fires that are harder to control. However, my observations are that other things have changed as well.

When we first moved here you could see that controlled burns took place regularly in the area, now they are a rarity. I have always believed that controlled burning is the best way of minimising the possibility of damaging bushfire. The justification for reducing such burning by environmental groups is highly questionable but seems to have been accepted by politicians and regulatory authorities. It is also readily admitted, in discussions, by local councils and others that the complaints over air quality by residents have had a major impact in the amount of controlled burning that now takes place. It is amazing that such complaints have had the impact it appears to have had on such an essential aspect of bushfire control.

There are other changes that have occurred in regards to controlled burning. Here are some examples. We are told by fire and emergency services to look after our properties and reduce undergrowth etc. Yet, years ago the Armadale City Council no longer allowed people to burn leaf litter and other vegetation in the built up areas of Roleystone. On the one hand this is understandable given the impact it does have on air quality for short periods of time on the other such a policy creates an additional brake on people's willingness to clean up built up litter around their homes.

For us on larger blocks it has become harder to do our own burning off. Years ago I could simply telephone the local volunteer bushfire brigade captain and ask for a permit to burn off on any day of the week and get one. I did this for at least fifteen years as I mosaic burned our property. Today that is no longer possible. To obtain a

permit to burn off I have to go to the Armadale Council offices during the working week as permits are only issued during a short one or two hour period in the afternoon. For those of us who work, to get a permit has become a major exercise. Recently, we have been advised that the permit can be obtained by telephone and received via a fax. However, this still had to be done during working hours and not on weekends. Additionally, we can no longer burn off on Sundays and public holidays further reducing the number of days available for such an activity. It seems that the policy settings here are intended to reduce the possibility of burning off rather than supporting landowners to do all they can to clear their land.

This lack of flexibility around the issuing of permits has meant that I can no longer burn as often as I did in the past. It is difficult to plan ahead for burning off as the right climatic conditions are crucial to a safe burn. So the restrictions of the number of days you can burn and the availability of permits greatly impact on your ability to keep the undergrowth on properties under control. So on the one hand we are encouraged and often criticised for not keeping our properties "clean" and on the other the authorities are continually placing barriers before us to be able to do so. There is an urgent need to review the above policy to allow both flexibility and responsiveness in the area of local, prescribed burning.

The Council requires landowners to have a suitable firebreak around a property. This is a reasonable expectation that most people adhere to. However, there is no check or requirement on whether or not bush blocks are being cleared or burned off regularly. In our area there are blocks of a few acres that have not been burned off for many years. They present a real danger to everyone around them but this appears to be inconsequential to our regulatory authorities. Very recently, as a result of the Roleystone/Kelmscott fire, we received a letter from our local Council threatening us with a fine if we did not reduce the fire load on our block. This was the first time that such a notice was served on us or our neighbours in twenty one years. Apparently, the Council had always had the power to require landowners to clear their blocks but had never chosen to enforce it.

If Councils are to enforce such a provision then this has to occur within a supportive and not just a punitive context. Councils need to work with local landowners to achieve the desired fuel load on blocks and not simply to require it. Such a requirement needs to be supported by educational initiatives to assist landowners to effectively look after their land. It needs to be supported by the provision of assistance so that people can confidently undertake burning off. Not everyone is able to burn off or otherwise clear large blocks due to financial or other restrictions. To ensure that people are able to meet their obligations Councils may need to reduce rates on such blocks so that people can afford to pay others to burn. Alternatively, volunteer bushfire brigades need to be far better resourced so that they can carry out such burning at a reduced price or in certain instances free of charge.

Local bushfire volunteers can help to burn off properties. We have used them for such a task and they do a great job. However, they are not cheap and it would be impossible for some people to afford it. They are expensive because they use the burning off as fundraising due to the lack of funding by the government. Volunteer brigades are such an important part of bushfire prevention and fighting but we cannot afford to fund and maintain them appropriately. This is amazing in a wealthy society like ours and is something that needs to be addressed urgently.

Government subsidies are provided for a number of environmental activities eg the reduction of water usage, however there is no such program to assist people in areas of high fire danger to undertake those functions that would reduce the impact of destructive bushfire.

There is a lack of coordination and cooperation in relation to burning off. Every summer landowners are told to reduce fire hazards on their properties. Yet, we regularly see areas that are the responsibility of local and state government authorities not being handled properly. There seems to be a lack of a coordinated approach to the reduction of fuel loads between private landowners and various authorities. The effort by landowners to reduce risk on their properties is often undermined by a lack of effort by government authorities to also reduce risk on their land eg state forests.

There is little point for a landowner to take precautions on his/her land if the surrounding government/council land is not adequately burned off and/or otherwise maintained. A variety of reports on bushfires suggest that prescribed burning is the single most effective preventative measure that can be taken to avoid disastrous bushfires yet the effort in this regard, especially around the highly populated hills areas of Perth, has, of recent years, been inadequate. Yet, the message that is regularly disseminated by fire authorities, especially through the media, is that the bulk of property owners are irresponsible and are partly, if not mainly, to blame for disastrous fires. There is little mention of the lack of responsible behaviour by councils and other authorities.

Roads near our home, that are essential for escaping a dangerous fire, have verges replete with undergrowth. This is so concerning that some of us decided to do some clearing but the job is far too large for such an effort. The Armadale City Council does not see it as their responsibility to clear the verges even though the land is clearly theirs. The Council will not clear it as such action would create a precedent. It fears that it will then have to clear all verges in the city. The fact that these particular verges are crucial to effective evacuation in a fire emergency appears to have no impact on their decision making. This exemplifies the lack of coherence between what authorities say and what they do. It also speaks of the lack of support that residents often receive on such matters.

### **Term of Reference 3**

A number of comments have already been made above regarding the issue of hazard reduction by property owners. The only comment to add here is that “enforcement regimes and penalties” to effect action in relation to hazard reduction is only part of the solution. However, they are usually the major means used by authorities to bring about change as they are relatively easy to impose and administer, apart from the obvious attraction of extra revenue in the case of fines.

Less attractive but more effective options are providing assistance to property owners to clear their land through subsidies or a reduction on council rates to help fund hazard reduction. It would be really helpful to residents to have a consultancy service that would, on an individual basis, assist them to understand fire behaviour and hazards, develop fire action plans and identify fire risks on their properties and advise them on what they can do about them. Recently, our family paid for such advice and we found it exceptionally helpful. Not everyone can afford to pay for this type of service but it is a practical and positive way of genuinely helping taxpayers to help themselves. There is a plethora of written information, DVDs etc and they have their uses but they do not speak to one’s specific situation and what actions need to be taken to both prepare for and respond to a threat.

Evaporative air conditioners seemed to be a major cause of the loss of homes in the Roleystone/Kelmscott fire. Recently, we needed to replace our evaporative system and much to our amazement it did not allow for the water to wet the pads without the fan operating at the same time. Turning off the fan meant turning off the water and making the evaporative system highly vulnerable to embers. The fact that modern evaporative systems do not allow a separation of these two functions is highly problematic and needs to be reviewed.

During a fire it is likely that electrical power would be lost and therefore evaporative systems could not run the small pump needed to wet the pads even if this function could be separated from the fan. This could be overcome by incorporating a small battery powered back up system. Alternatively, systems for high risk areas could have incorporated within them appropriate mesh that was able to exclude embers. We have resolved the problem by surrounding our evaporative system with small sprinklers that are activated when the fire sprinkler system for the house is turned on.

In Roleystone there are areas, and our estate is one, where the only water supply is from rainwater tanks. Despite the fact that the houses in our area are very close to mains water, the supply of such water was never a condition of the original subdivision. This means that during the summer months most residents that rely on tank water need to cart it in at some point due to dwindling water supplies. This means that the availability of water to protect property is highly variable between properties depending on how much water is in a tank at any point in time. It is the

responsibility of the home owner to make sure that a tank contains an adequate amount of water. It is however, very expensive to cart water and this expense creates a barrier to property owners that have to regularly top up their tanks. The cost of carting water, especially during summer months is an issue that needs to be considered in any serious attempt to deal with bushfire readiness.

The preference of many owners on tanks would be to have main water but the relevant authorities state that it is too expensive to extent main water to our properties. The reality is that without adequate water it is difficult to have an effective fire prevention and fire fighting response. The issue of expense is relevant however so are the issues of saving lives and property.

Local volunteer fire-fighters have stated that there are some areas of Roleystone that are on mains water but whose water pressure is so low that it is relatively useless in fighting a fire. Water supply is a significant issue for many Roleystone residents and for fire-fighters and one that the inquiry may wish to address.

It seems from experiences in the Victorian bushfires, that sprinkler systems, if well designed, can provide an effective defence during bushfires. They can also provide an effective first up defence against an ember attack. To date there is a dearth of information on the most effective sprinkler designs. In Western Australia there are also few people that are experienced in the design and building of such systems. They can also be quite expensive depending on the materials used. A full copper system is prohibitive in cost but is considered to be the most reliable. It is possible that some of the homes destroyed in the Roleystone/Kelmscott could have been saved if they had effective sprinkler systems as these would have provided a defence against the embers that lodged in the evaporative systems. It would be helpful to residents to have more information on such systems, to be encouraged to have them and for the government to investigate how the cost of such systems could be reduced.

#### **Term of Reference 4**

During the recent fire a message on radio that spoke of the need for residents in a particular area of Roleystone to consider evacuating in the next 20 minutes as they were at high risk was transmitted over a period of 3 hours. The usefulness of such a message is questionable when it is repeated over such a long period of time as it loses impact and relevance. When attempting to determine whether to stay or go the most important information is to know the severity of the fire, its location, its speed and direction. This information needs to be regularly updated and communicated. Without such information it is difficult to make a decision on whether to leave the home or not.

The current policy of stating that lives and property are at risk and that one needs to make a decision to go or stay and defend is too general. It can lead to people leaving homes prematurely and leaving them susceptible to ember attack. The emphasis on

protecting lives above property is unarguably correct, however it is unfair on residents not to provide the type of detailed information that they need to make a decision as to whether or not they leave.

One wonders how many houses could have been saved in the Kelmscott area if people had been home to protect them if they had received more accurate information. I know of at least one story where an elderly, Kelmscott couple came home to find their external furniture on fire and with flames from it lapping at the house. They were able to save their home because they were there to deal with the ember attack. It is a difficult balancing act but the current communication is too simplistic and is, in my opinion, leading to unnecessary loss of homes. The loss of a home should not be underestimated in relation to the significant emotional and financial consequences it has for those who live there.

To:  
Perth Hills Bushfire 2011 Review  
197 St Georges Tce  
PERTH WA 6000  
From:  
Ms Patricia Bensley

Thursday 14 April 2011

**Submission to help prevent bushfire damage in the hills area.**

We (my husband Dave Carroll and son Adrian Dunstan) live at [REDACTED], Kelmscott, and on Sunday 6 February 2011 our home was impacted by the bushfires that swept through the area. Sadly our neighbors on either side of our driveway, at [REDACTED] had their homes burned completely down, with [REDACTED] losing part of their yard and fencing.

We had loss of a lot of fencing, front garden and gazebo burned, some windows cracked, some garden furniture burned, and our automatic security gates were also burned, needing replacing. But we were so lucky, as our house is still standing. Dave had installed a roof sprinkler system on the roof of our house last summer, which has no doubt had a good impact in helping to save our home, though helitak water bombers and FESA ground crew certainly made the biggest help towards saving our home. We are so grateful for this!

Here are 3 points in bold print that we are putting for submission.

**1. MOBILE PHONE WARNING SYSTEM TO BE UPGRADED.**

On Sunday 6 February if we had not got home in time to turn on the roof sprinkler system and hose our property down, we would have lost our home. We were lucky to have had a phone call from our son. If he had not been there to call then the outcome would have been very different, which is why we would like to see the mobile phone texting system of warning to be upgraded. We got our warning text message at 4pm, which by that stage we were watching our neighbors' homes burning from a distance. We think that the system has great potential but the bureaucratic delays in sending the SMS need to be eliminated.

We would like to see the mobile phone texting system to be one which gives out an early warning if firestorm conditions are imminent, giving residents time to organize safety systems around their homes to be switched on, or to alert people who can do this for us. We have a proper Fire Plan in place written up by our front door, and the extra warning time would allow this to be fully implemented.

**2. REGULAR COUNCIL INSPECTIONS OF PROPERTIES FOR CORRECTLY BUILT OUTBUILDINGS, AND PREVENTION OF FLAMMABLE JUNK BUILD UP IN YARDS, OR, A METHOD TO REPORT SUCH BUILD UPS.**

Some of our neighbors have had a build up of flammable stuff on their large properties, with building materials being stacked along the side of fence lines. We feel that these properties could have been saved and ours not damaged if these types of hoarding were not permitted.

For example, one residence had a dozens of old car tyres and old car bodies. (See attached photos). When bushfire embers hit the tyres, we saw the whole place go up in a sudden huge black cloud and then flames raged everywhere, burning fences. The helitaks were unable to extinguish such a large number of tyres and burning cars.

The fire then transferred from this to the next neighbor who had large quantities of building materials and timber stacked on his property. This residence also had sheds/buildings built right on a neighbor's back fence line, (illegal, no Council permit?) and the build up of timber building materials on this property was providing the bushfire with plenty of extra fuel. (See attached photos.)

There is evidence of outbuildings too close alongside some fence lines, and rubbish build up on archived images of Google Earth for our area.

We feel that if it wasn't for the build up of car bodies, tyres and timber on 2 properties near us, we would have all survived the bushfire, as it had been contained up to the back fence of our homes at Lloyd Hughes Reserve on \_\_\_\_\_ St.

So, could there be annual inspections of people's properties in the bushfire prone hills areas to ensure that sheds etc are legally built correctly away from neighbors fences, and that there be no build up of flammable material on properties that could affect other people?

**Perhaps there could be a phone number people could call to Council if it is deemed some people are causing a fire risk by the build up of material on their properties?**

## **2. COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITY IN PROPERLY CLEARING FIREBREAKS ADJOINING RESIDENTS' PROPERTIES.**

There is a firebreak along Marmion Street dirt road section down to Canning Mills Road, but the Council verge land between that and our fence line is heavily bushy. On 2 occasions we have written to Council asking for removal of this bush land because of bushfire risk. Dave risked his life on Sunday 6 February hosing this area down. If it had been cleared, we would have been safer!

It is a difficult sloping slippery area to clear by Council workers with special equipment.

All areas that are Council property adjoining residents should be cleared on a regular basis, and not left in the "too hard" basket. At the present moment, it is still a dangerous area and is spooking us, after what has happened in the recent fires.

Kind Regards for reading this submission:

Patricia Bensley (Ms)

Please see attached photos showing build up of flammable material on some properties that burned down, including sheds on fenceline.

**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**

<b>Name:</b>	Paul Matthews
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Email address:</b>	
<b>Telephone number:</b>	

**Organisation Details (Where Applicable)**

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

**Response to Terms of Reference**

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

- 1. The adequacy of current preventative measures, specifically prescribed burning and other bushfire mitigation activities.** No opinion offered.

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.** No opinion offered.
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.**

Improved standards and enforcement regimes and penalties as mooted above would reduce the number of smaller more local tragedies as well as the likelihood of larger ones such as this. Without this much existing housing stock is vulnerable to property to property involvement (1).

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.**

We have a stream of migrants and tourists from overseas. Some may have no knowledge of bush fires and poor language skills. This is difficult to address and, tourists or terrorists, all ignition sources can't be eliminated, so items 1-3 above are key.

There were reports from this incident of poor preparedness of properties (vegetation) and poor awareness ("what's an ember attack?"; lighted cigarette end being discarded from car window). Many urban people do not anticipate that their suburb may burn down, and they do expect to get a fire truck if their house is under threat(8). **While state governments were aware of the likelihood of this type of urban incident(1,7), bush fire information campaigns tend to have a rural emphasis.** People with low bush fire awareness are not just unlikely to be prepared, they are more likely to accidentally cause fires. While there is a high awareness of risk now, experience indicates this will fade over time(2).

Bush fire education includes relaying the messages that "burning embers may attack from far away, the risk is people's own responsibility and that a fire truck may not be available to help" (3). Contact with people in high risk areas indicates some have clearly been sold inappropriate homes. For example:

- elderly frail people with poor mobility who could not evacuate quickly if a fire started nearby
- "absentees", eg commuters or holiday home owners who would not be on hand to defend their homes or help others.
- the concerned lady who phoned FESA and was (rightly) told "if you feel like that you should not be living there".

Many of these did not understand the risk when they bought their homes, and many are not content to just prepare and insure their

homes and hope for the best. Processes used to communicate the bush fire risk to these newcomers when they chose their home was inadequate and needs augmenting. Given the risk to life and homes, **anything less than a very clear warning on advertisements of such property seems inappropriate.**

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

Volunteer fire-fighters from various shires were asked to attend this incident so the following opinion might fall within your terms of reference.

Despite numerous inquiries over many decades (2) fire agencies mission of community safety has usually been subordinate to drivers of economic growth (4). Fire agencies tend to be held accountable for the consequences of an increasingly complex mosaic of development in high risk areas plus other pressures. These consequences include increasing loss of lives and homes to the point where home insurance cover is becoming too costly for many (6).

Another consequence of this pressure on fire agencies is that volunteering and the ethos of community service is being undermined, and with them so is local community safety and resilience (4,5). There are increasing professionalisation pressures and training updates on volunteer bushfire fire-fighters. Traditionally the primary role for volunteer brigades has been to mobilise quickly to contain local fires before they become major fires. Many volunteers who have demonstrated adequate competence in their own district and have valuable local knowledge (2) are leaving because they are not willing to spend the additional time asked for. The declining depth of volunteers numbers is being exacerbated by peri-urban housing developments being imposed by state or local government in high risk areas (8) often against local community wishes. Newcomers in these developments are often absentees or just do not embrace, so therefore undermine, the reciprocity that underpins community service such as fire-fighting (8,9). An incongruity is evident with FESA's "Prepare, Act, Survive" message which attempts to reach (inexperienced and untrained) civilians and advise them that they can't rely on help from fire-fighters and they may lose their lives and/or homes unless they can successfully defend them themselves.

## **REFERENCES**

1. FESA, The Canberra Fires documentary,. In January 2003, 4 people died and 474 homes were destroyed in the suburbs of Canberra. This was not due to the flames or radiant heat from the main bushfire, it was caused by ember attack from a distance and then property to property involvement. The homes had scheme

water, underground power and adequate roads. Issues included garden/house design and insufficient fire-fighting resources. The FESA message was our urban interfaces are vulnerable and it could happen here.

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2. COAG Inquiry including findings from 12 previous inquests and inquiries from 1939 to 2003. Includes 'consistent themes':

"Increased emphasis on risk reduction, The value of volunteers, Education and awareness, Complacency, The adequacy of resourcing, Protective burning, Communication, The importance of access, Local knowledge, Local government, The insurance industry".

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3. FESA, PREPARE, ACT, SURVIVE, 2009

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4. In 2008 Australasian Fire Authority Council CEO, Naomi Brown, and Bushfire CRC Project Leader, Professor John Handmer, jointly published a synthesis of the key issues in emergency management (Ten Commitments, CSIRO Publishing, 2008). The top two issues identified by these national authorities prior to Victoria's Black Saturday were:

"1. Review policy and legislation to ascertain the presence of incentives to create disasters, transfer risk and undermine resilience.

2. Review and alter liability regimes to ensure liability resides with those who create the risk."

Further extracts follow:

"...There is a strong emphasis on accident prevention and safety in Australian policy and legislation. However, this emphasis does not always extend to larger scale events and to the potential disasters from settlement patterns. Disaster prevention efforts, and to some extent safety regulations, are often seen as little more than impediments to economic growth. ....the economic costs of disasters which are almost always borne by the individuals impacted and by governments, rather than those responsible for creating the risk who often find it easy to transfer risk to others...."

"Often, there appears to be strong incentives in legislation and policy to create vulnerable situations through, for example, policies that provide subsidies for the development of flood-prone land, that permit the development of high hazard - and often environmentally important - coastal and stream areas, that remove sources of information on hazards, or that

unintentionally undermine the resilience of people and communities...

"Local authorities will often be blamed, but their supposed power to regulate is often overruled by State governments or planning tribunals. In any case, most Australian jurisdictions do not use prescriptive planning regulations, and planning is increasingly about facilitating major developments rather than attempting to enhance local economic advantage or hazard avoidance...

"Australian emergency management has been very successful... But success can bring its own hazards. For emergency management, these include unrealistic expectations on the part of those at risk and perhaps governments, as well as an implicit belief that as climate changes, and as many of our settlements and activities become more vulnerable, emergency managers can provide protection. This increasing dependence on fire and emergency management provides a short-term solution to the issue of adaptation to change, but is not compatible with sustainability....."

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5. Michelle Roberts, Emergency Services Minister, Hansard, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005:

"..FESA might want to talk to local governments about brigade A or brigade B and whether they should continue or whether it would be better off to provide a brigade in a growing area.."

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6. Home Cover too costly for many, Weekend Australian, 22-23/1/2011. extracts: Elaine Collins, an insurance partner with accounting firm Deloitte quoted ".. natural disasters were not occurring more frequently, but the cost of such events was rising because more people were moving into...such as flood prone sites near rivers and bushland vulnerable to fire".

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7. Understanding Communities Project, Bushfire CRC, Update November 2007. "...Of particular concern is that many people who live in the urban interface think they have adequate plans to deal with bushfires, but when we delve into them they are clearly not enough..."

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8. FIRE NOTE, Bushfire CRC, Issue 9, November 2006  
"..in many peri-urban places around Australia the growing mix of people and property with bushland creates the potential for disaster.." **"..The results demonstrated that people have a heavy reliance on the Rural Fire Brigade to protect people and property during bush fire (93%). Those who may rely more heavily than others include those with an urban background, newcomers**

(**<10 years**), those more concerned about the bush fire hazard,  
and those with positive perceptions about the Fire Brigade and  
Fire Levy..”

9 Pretty, J. The Living Land. 2007

END OF DOCUMENT

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

**By  
Locals Against Wildfires**

**Locals Against Wildfires Inc.**

## **Introduction**

Fire mitigation and response in Western Australia (W.A.) are the focus of **Locals Against Wildfire** (LAW). The members of LAW are mostly practical farmers and land managers, with great experience in all aspects of fire.

The intention of this Submission by LAW is to highlight the recent failures of the system we currently have in place. In 1954, a Bushfires Act was formulated. In approximately the last 10 years, changes to this system and the lack of enforcement of the Bushfires Act have seen the damage from fires increase. More houses have burnt in the last 18 months than in the last 50 years in W.A. LAW will give a practical, proactive, approach to how best improve the current systems for fire management in W.A.

## **Fire Risk Management & Fire Fuel Reduction**

Fire mitigation, since first settlement in Western Australia, has been effectively achieved by **Fire Fuel Reduction** as well as **Education and Awareness** for people who may be affected by fire. During much of the history of W.A. this was the only weapon available, other than a horse and fire rake, to use against fire. When this system has not been used as the *first line of defence*, the risk to lives and property has dramatically increased with devastating results.

### **Current problems and suggested solutions:**

- 1) The lack of one governing authority that is responsible to manage, focus on, support and enforce *fire risk management* and *fire fuel reduction* in all areas of our State including Private land, DEC land, Crown land, Local Government land, Main Roads, Railways and all other land, with the direct intention of protecting lives and property.
- ❖ It is important that a single authority similar to the old Rural Bushfires Board is formed to take responsibility to oversee, coordinate and enforce fire risk management and fire fuel reduction on all land where life and property are at risk. Currently, there are different agencies responsible for different areas. The problem with this is, if one of these agencies does not understand its responsibilities, or fails to carry them out effectively, the whole system breaks down. This is demonstrated by the lack of enforcement of Bushfire Law.

For example, the Gelorup and Leschenault areas around Bunbury were described by FESA as high fire risk areas in a local newspaper. When I asked FESA what is being done to reduce the risk, I was told it is not their responsibility, it is the Local Government's responsibility. It is important that rural and semi-rural properties on the edges of our towns and cities have effective fire risk management and fire fuel reduction. Otherwise, these areas can act as wick for a fire, allowing it to travel into the more densely populated areas which they often surround.

I questioned FESA on the high fire hazard loads on the edge of many of our main highways, some of which is caused by the vegetation which has been planted to regenerate the edges of the roads. FESA told me that it is Main Roads responsibility. It is important that our main roads have safe areas to place road blocks when there is a fire in the area, otherwise road blocks and the people can become engulfed in flames if trapped.

We need a uniform approach to fire risk management and fire fuel reduction, especially in high fire prone areas. We need someone to take responsibility, not keep handballing it to other agencies.

If a **Fire Risk Reduction Agency** was formed they could assist, where necessary, any person or group responsible for fire risk management and fire fuel reduction and would have authority over Local Government, Main Roads and other authorities. The **Fire Risk Reduction Agency** could also be responsible for the education of the public, as well as other people and groups involved in fire management. The agency could develop a *code of practice* in regards to fire risk management and fire fuel reduction (which does not have to be limited to controlled burns) which they could oversee and enforce where necessary. A **Fire Risk Reduction Agency** could keep and update maps of fire fuel loadings in high risk areas. The Agency could also deal with the other issues listed below.

- 2) Public concern for effects of smoke from **fuel reduction burns** (controlled burns) on their life style and health.
  - ❖ The smoke from fire fuel reduction burns is criticised by some vocal members of the public. This is an indication that there is a lack of understanding of how important these burns are. People need to be educated that these burns, regardless of how annoying the smoke is, are better than an uncontrollable fire on a 40 degree day. Better education is need.
- 3) The increasing **regulations and liabilities** in regard to fuel reduction burns in case of injury or damage to property.
  - ❖ We must ensure that this risk does not prevent a fuel reduction burn. There is always a chance a building may be damaged if a fuel reduction burn escapes, this is still better than the damaged done by wild fires in the middle of summer. Roadside burns can now be difficult due to traffic management issues, even on small roads. We need to make sure, especially for volunteers, that there is assistance given to help with the traffic management issues and full legal protection for volunteers. If assistance is not given then controlled burns may not be carried out. The assessment of wildlife and flora in proposed burn areas must be carried out in a timely manner to ensure controlled burns can be undertaken. Fuel reduction burns too should be done in areas where they are the most effective in protecting lives and property regardless of the level of difficulty.
- 4) Policies restricting clearing of native vegetation around buildings.
  - ❖ Areas where policies restrict the clearing of native vegetation around buildings in order to protect the native bush, need to be revisited as this can contribute to high fire fuel loadings around homes and their access ways. This can also make it hard to conduct controlled fuel reduction burns in the area.

5) The failure to enforce the **1954 Bushfires Act**.

- ❖ The 1954 Bushfires Act clearly identifies prescribed burning as an effective way of reducing fire fuel loadings. These findings have been reinforced at many fires over the years. For example, at the Dwellingup fire of 1961 where 114 homes were lost but luckily no lives, lack of fire fuel reduction burns were one of the factors that made the fire so uncontrollable.

More recently, a large fire in the Ferndale area near Balingup during 2009 was able to be brought under control because it burnt into a fuel reduction burned area from the previous year.

Reducing fuel loadings around our towns and cities should be a continuous aim of any **fire management plan** as this is a proactive approach rather than a reactive one.

6) Maps detailing fire fuel loadings to be tabled in Parliament once a year.

- ❖ Maps should be tabled in Parliament showing fuel loadings around the State to ensure that each year fire fuel loading levels will be addressed and proper attention will be given to this important issue. It will also let the public and the Press know where the dangers are.

7) The failure to supply *community guidance material* on **fire retardant landscape and garden design**, including a list of fire retardant species.

- ❖ There are examples in the United States of America where this has been done. I questioned FESA if they had a list of fire retardant plants, their reply was, “We have been working with a number of universities for a number of years and have been unable to yet compile a list”. Guidance on fire retardant landscape and garden design, including a list of fire retardant species, needs to be developed and issued to all plant nurseries and sent out with local Shire Rate notices as it is equally as important as fire breaks.

8) The failure to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of community education programs and amend them where necessary.

- ❖ FESA has been running campaigns for the last 10 years to educate people on the dangers of evaporative air conditioners during bushfires. At the Perth Hills Fire it has been estimate that 32 of the 72 houses were destroyed due to evaporative air conditioners. After the fire, a distributor of the air conditioners said there is a screen that can be fitted to help stop ember attacks during bushfires. A Fire Risk Reduction Agency could inform people who have evaporative air conditioners that there are screens which can be installed to help stop ember attacks during bushfires.

At the beginning of this fire season there was a centre page spread in the Western Australian Newspaper, informing people on how to make their property fire safe. After the outcome of the Perth Hills Fire, we must ask if the effectiveness of the above program has ever been evaluated.

**The effectiveness of education programs needs to be evaluated and amended as necessary to ensure that the information and warnings are reaching people in our bushfire prone areas.**

9) Method of enforcement.

- ❖ The current system of enforcement is to issue a Work Order or a fine for non-compliance of fire regulations. It could be considered that fines be increased significantly, but should only be issued after a compulsive education program has been completed if there is a non-compliance of fire regulations. This could be done online, as a work booklet or a DVD. A questionnaire could also be completed on fire risk management as part of the penalty for non-compliance of fire regulations. **Our first priority should be education not penalty, but penalties are required where people refuse to be educated.**

10) The development of more advanced fire suppression equipment must not move the focus from **fire risk reduction** to **fire suppression**.

- ❖ The development of more advanced fire suppression equipment should not replace fire risk reduction and similar funding should apply to both.

The above comments and suggestions on fire risk reduction will take a lot of effort from everyone involved to put into place. FESA is spending 27 million dollars to employ another 102 fire fighters over the next 4 years. If part of this money was instead spent on **fire risk reduction** then we would not need more fire fighters, and our existing fire fighters would be able to be more effective. When you consider WA has more fire suppression than ever before, yet we have lost more houses in the last 18 months than ever before, are more fire fighters really then the best solution!

## **Perth Hills Fire**

The following is an explanation of how poor fuel reduction affects fire in three different stages and how this **affected the outcome of the Perth Hills Fire**:

### **1. Ignition Point**

High fuel levels can make it harder to contain a fire to a small area when it first ignites, which if contained would stop it escalating into a major fire.

At the Perth Hills Fire it was reported that the fire, which was started by an angle grinder, was quickly contained and incoming crews were told to stand down. Shortly after this, the fire took off again regardless of the immense effort by fire fighters to keep the fire to a small area. I visited the area where the fire started and, as the picture below demonstrates, there seems to be high fuel loadings in the area. It must be considered that even though the fire was started by an angle grinder, was it the high fire fuel loading in the area that turned the fire into a devastating fire, due to the fact that it was unable to be contained to a small area because of the high fuel loading that existed.



Photograph: 13.03.2011 The Brookton Highway between Kelmscot and Roleystone, after the fire, near the fire area. The vegetation is knee deep and very dry. It is at the base of a hill which has a significant amount of houses on it.

## 2. Speed and Intensity

If a fire does escalate, high fuel loading increases the intensity and speed of a fire making it harder to contain. It also increases spot fire generation and ember attacks in the surrounding areas.

Was it high fire fuel loadings that made the Perth Hills Fire so hard to contain? Was it this high fire fuel loading that caused, in one area, 13 homes to be destroyed, of which it was reported that the majority of them seemed to have suffered from ember attacks? Were these long-distant spot fires, caused by ember attacks generated within bushland with heavy fire fuel loadings? Did this increase the number of homes that were destroyed? These are questions that need to be asked, but I think most people involved already know the answer.

## 3. Around Houses and Buildings

High fuel loadings around buildings make them much harder to save and protect once a fire reaches them.

After a tour of the fire damage at the Perth Hills Fire, the Premier of W.A. Colin Barnett said 'he could see that many of the homes that were saved had clear areas around them'. In other words, what he was saying is homes with low fire fuel loadings around them were better able to be protected.

The summary, in regards to **Fire Risk Reduction**, is that the current system must be improved to produce more positive outcomes. Lives must come first, but we should not underestimate the long term impact that losing a home to a bushfire can have on men, women and children's lives.

There is no doubt that in some areas, as a reaction from the recent devastating fire, that there will be some action taken towards fire mitigation. However, what we should be asking is why so little seems to have been done before this point and how do we ensure, that from now on things improve and continue to improve even after people start to forget what happened at the Perth Hills Fire.

## **Memo Report**

The Memo Report on the following page (page 9) has been written by two experienced Fire Fighters who attended the Perth Hills Fire. They are not members of LAW. After the fire, I contacted them and asked them if they would like to share what they experienced at the fire. They arrived at the fire at 5pm on the day the Roleystone–Kelmscot fire started and did one twelve hour shift.

## Memo Report

To Mr Mick Keelty

From Clinton Bailey  
Fire Control Officer  
Balingup Bushfire Brigade

Don Cooper  
Crew Member  
Balingup Bushfire Brigade

Date April 6, 2011

Subject **Roleystone Bushfire February 2011**

It is our opinion that a significant amount of property loss was avoidable in the Roleystone fire. We make the following suggestions with the aim of reducing this:

1. A 'defence in depth' achieved by
  - The establishment of a strong system of Bushfire Ready Action Groups (BRAGs), allowing the BRAGs to remain in the fire zone in all but the most catastrophic situations. BRAG members would have a crucial advantage in terms of local knowledge, which was unavoidably lacking in teams coming in from, say, Walpole, Wyalkatchem and Busseton.
  - Mandatory fire fighting training for rural landholders.
2. That an information pack be issued to each fire-fighting team, including
  - Sector map
  - Radio channel to be used
  - Name of sector commander
  - Contact phone number of sector commander

Some of the above was in place, but there was a problem in that there was

  - Initial confusion as to the radio channel to be used
  - Two changes of sector commander during our shift (i.e. three commanders in total)
  - Sometimes difficulty contacting the sector commander because he was away from the vehicle radio
3. With several changes of sector commander possible, it is important that one member of the sector commander's crew be designated as scribe in order to formalise sector history in terms of communications and fire progress. This person would also act as the understudy and communications assistant to the sector commander. This would enable any new commander to quickly get on top of what had been done to date within the sector.
4. Enhanced prescribed burning programs on both Crown and private land.
5. Greater public education in terms of hazard reduction.
6. Instructions were given that priority be given to protection of life, rather than property. This is standard instruction to fire fighters, but if carried too far, can arguably result in unnecessary loss of property. It is felt that this may have happened in the case of the Roleystone fire.

The above suggestions are offered in the spirit of trying to create a continuous improvement culture within the fire fighting system. If climate change continues on the trend of the last several decades, very significant efficiency improvement will have to be achieved just to keep up with the threat to lives and property.



CLINTON BAILEY



DON COOPER

## **Fire Response and Management**

Western Australia is a very large area. How fires are responded to and managed will vary. In this submission the lower part of WA is the main focus.

In October 2009, new legislation was passed through Parliament as a matter of urgency to enhance fire management and community safety, taking into account the tragic events in Victoria and the relevant recommendations of the subsequent 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The changes to fire management were mainly in regards to large multi-agency bushfires. As this is a new system, LAW would expect that a review of operations would occur after a large incident, to assist in improving this new system. LAW's aim in this submission is to contribute to this review process by sharing our concerns and observations.

The system currently used at large multi-agency fires puts a joint Incident Management Team (IMT) in control, working under a State and/or Regional Command. LAW believes the structure and operation of these teams may be improved if the following suggestions are taken into consideration when reviewing their operational performance:

- 1. Ensure that there is a consistent level of experience, education and training of Incident 3 Controllers.**

There are concerns within LAW about how FESA Incident 3 Controllers gain their experience as FESA does not carry out large scale controlled burns, like DEC, which is where their incident controllers gain a lot of experience. FESA Incident 3 Controllers and their support staff should participate in large scale controlled burns to gain experience and become familiar with the DEC personnel who they may be in control of at a Level 3 fire.

- 2. Ensure that the Incident 3 Controller is familiar with the area and known to the people they will be in control of.**

FESA Incident 3 Controllers need to know what areas they may be taking control of, in a bushfire emergency. To expect someone to take control over local volunteers and DEC fire fighters who they may have never worked with before in an area that they may not be familiar with, cannot be considered 'best practice'. It is important that the volunteers know and trust the Incident Controller in charge of them, regardless of which agency they are from.

**3. Ensure that volunteers know and understand what their role is, if FESA or DEC has taken control of a high risk fire.**

It is important that Volunteer Officers understand what their role is if another agency takes over a fire in their area. Local knowledge can assist greatly in the management of extreme fires. Unless Volunteer Officers are familiar with their role, their knowledge may not be utilized.

**4. Ensure all agencies are familiar with using the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS).**

In the **Westplan** (bushfire management plan) this is the system that inter-agency fires are to be managed under. It is important that all personnel involved from each agency understands how to work together under this system. There should be joint training and exercises in the operation of AIIMS.

**5. Ensure Sector Commanders are chosen correctly.**

It should be considered that if a Sector Commander is not familiar with the area or people, that a local volunteer fire officer is then chosen to work with them. Local volunteer fire officers should be aware that their role at a large fire is either to be a Sector Commander or to assist a Sector Commander. To expect a Sector Commander to control an area which he is not familiar with and with fire crews which he has never worked with before is not 'best practice'.

**6. Ensure that the new National Policy of 'life before property' does not inadvertently contribute to a large loss of property.**

We need to ensure that the Incident Management Team in control is adequately staffed and trained to focus on both saving lives and property. Saving lives has always come first for any emergency service. Trained Fire Fighters should not be unnecessarily prevented from entering a potentially dangerous situation to protect homes because of risk to their life. Fire Fighters are trained to assess if a situation is dangerous.

**7. Ensure that any person or fire fighter has the ability to express concerns or observations they have about a fire.**

It is important that there is a system where people can email or speak on the telephone about their concerns and observations of a fire and if they choose, keep their communications confidential. Debriefings, which happen after a fire, are usually done as a group meeting. Some people may not be able to attend or feel uncomfortable speaking in a group. Useful information is often not shared about a fire from both Fire Fighters and the public.

In summary, fire suppression in Western Australia is at a very high standard for fires of low to moderate intensity. These fires are controlled each year without loss of life or property. It is our management of large multi-agency fires which needs to be addressed. When fires like the one in Perth Hills occur, we need to understand why so many lives and property were affected. The review into the Toodyay Fire, which is the only review of a fire managed under the new system, found the following:

The Incident Management Team (IMT) was not correctly formed. This impacted on the capacity of the IMT to perform its full range of responsibilities effectively. This highlighted the requirement for FESA to strengthen existing formal inter-agency arrangements, through training and exercises to establish a level of certainty and common understanding in relation to inter-agency cooperation.

The main intention of the new legislation is to streamline control arrangements and strengthen liability protection for Volunteers and DEC personal.

### **Streamlining control arrangements:**

It is not only new legislation that streamlines fire control between agencies, it is agencies working and training together to make themselves a team rather than a group, before they need to manage fires in extreme conditions together. DEC has indicated to me that when they conduct large scale burns, they would welcome involvement of other agencies. If FESA and Volunteers were involved in DEC burns it would strengthen their ability to operate as a team in extreme fire conditions. Controlled Burns should be used as a training ground to improve multi-agency ability to work together, whether it is private or public land controlled burns.

### **Liability Protection:**

How the strengthening of liability protection for Volunteers and DEC personal is achieved? Is it achieved by taking away their ability to make decisions for themselves at extreme fires? How does FESA provide liability protection for its own personnel? Is it achieved by FESA not sending fire crews into areas which may be dangerous and focusing on evacuations rather than fire suppression and property protection?

## References

- Toodyay Fire Review
- Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission
- Western Australian News Paper
- SES Volunteers Association of Western Australia Web site
- FESA Web site
- Bushfires Amendment Bill 2009
- 2011 March 2<sup>nd</sup> LAW meeting at Parliament Houses with Rob Johnston, David Caporn (FESA), Ralph Smith (FESA)
- Discussions with Busselton Department of Environment and Conservation
- Discussions with LAW members
- Discussion with the Volunteer Fire Fighters

*The information contained in this Submission is provided by John Guest, in his role as Vice President of Locals Against Wildfires (LAW). John is a third generation volunteer fire fighter and farmer from the South West of W.A. It is prepared in good faith and is derived from sources believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of writing. Reliability and accuracy of the information cannot be guaranteed. Readers should obtain their own independent advice and make their own necessary inquiries.*

## **Contact Details**

**John Guest**

Vice President of L.A.W.

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

### **From the Anglican Church, Parish of Armadale**

This Submission relates to section 5 of the Terms of Reference:

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

### **Background to this Submission**

On the afternoon of 6 February 2011, the Priest in Charge of the Anglican Parish of Armadale arrived at the Armadale Arena as the Evacuation Centre opened.

Throughout that afternoon, members of the Parish provided much needed organisational skills and support to the Arena staff and DCP in establishing the Evacuation Centre.

On the first evening, when it became apparent that the Salvation Army was unable to provide meals at the Centre until 9pm (their food van was in the „hot zone’), the Anglican Parish of Armadale organised dinner for the evacuees, some of whom had not eaten since breakfast.

With the increasing numbers of evacuees on Monday, the Anglican Parish of Armadale once again provided kitchen staff, pastoral support, organisational skills, a mobile cool room and dinner (chicken and salad) for all in the Evacuation Centre.

Significantly, the Anglican Church also provided blankets, non-perishable food, and pastoral care.

The Anglican Church remained „on duty’ at the Evacuation Centre / Recovery Centre throughout the week until it closed on Friday evening.

### **Comment about coordination of activities (volunteer groups)**

The current State Emergency Plan (reviewed in March 2011) indicates in Appendix 3 the roles and responsibilities of a number of statutory, private and voluntary organisations to provide a range of welfare services. Appendix 3 also states that welfare services “At the local level . . . may be varied to suit the capabilities and availability of welfare organisations and should be reflected in the Local Emergency Management Plan for the Provision of Welfare Support”.

In the instance of the fires in the Armadale hills, the procedures for provision of welfare in accordance with the State Emergency Plan appeared to lack coordination with local volunteer groups, including local churches.

In particular, during the establishment phase - at least - of the Evacuation Centre in the Armadale Arena, those responsible for the Local Emergency Management Plan did not appear to be aware of the capability and capacity of the local church groups.

The Anglican Parish of Armadale was capable and available, and made a significant contribution to the provision of welfare services over many days.

### **Recommendation – Establish a Register of local volunteer groups**

A Register needs to be compiled of local volunteer groups (including churches) with the ability to muster volunteers and provide welfare support, such as emergency accommodation, meals, bedding, personal requisites and pastoral care.

Such a Register would enable local churches/groups to work concurrently with the Local Welfare Coordinators, providing much needed local knowledge and expertise.

The Register would need to be kept

- at local council offices, state emergency headquarters, and with local volunteer groups
- current and accessed easily in times of emergency / disaster.

For more information, please contact:

The Reverend Jan Boyle,  
Priest in Charge, Anglican Parish of Armadale

**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**

<b>Name:</b>	Rod Ross
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Email address:</b>	
<b>Telephone number:</b>	

**Organisation Details (Where Applicable)**

<b>Is this submission presented on behalf of an organisation:</b>	Yes
<b>If yes, name of organisation:</b>	Armadale Region Business Association Inc
<b>Position in organisation:</b>	Treasurer

**Response to Terms of Reference**

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

Armadale Region Business Association is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the interests of businesses in the Armadale region. In the interests of the local business community, businesses in the affected areas were informed about the Perth Hills

Bushfire review and invited to make their own submission or alternatively make comment to us on the impact of the fires on their business.

The responses we collected have been consolidated and are summarised under Terms of Reference point 5.

- 1. The adequacy of current preventative measures, specifically prescribed burning and other bushfire mitigation activities.**
- 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.**
- 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.**
- 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.**
- 5. Improvements that can be made in relation to the coordination of activities across all levels of government, including with volunteer groups.**

Many businesses in the Roleystone area suffered from a dramatic reduction in trade in the aftermath of the fires. This was due to road closures, power outages and the reduction of customers who were otherwise engaged in addressing their own fire impacts. One business commented they were so badly affected by a decline in revenue that wages could not be met.

It was also reported that in the process of attempting to access the sources for information and assistance, a high degree of confusion reigned, with a lot of misinformation being provided.

With the Brookton Highway being closed off at Buckingham Bridge the lack of appropriate detour signage and guidance caused a high degree of avoidance of the area.

There also appeared to be a lack of assistance for businesses that suffered financially but not physically from the fires.

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**Contact Details**

<b>Name:</b>	Laurie Biggs
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**Organisation Details (Where Applicable)**

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

**Response to Terms of Reference**

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

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

**Many country areas are boarded by state forests or reserves, adequate prescribed burns have not been carried out by the relevant departments and when many have they have been lit on days when right thinking men would not, but it seems that if a date has been set that's the day it takes place the consequences being out of control fires.**

**Again common sense has to prevail Fire has no knowledge of weather conditions man does, agencies and property owners have to be given flexibility to carry out burns sensible, I believe giving notice of a prescribed burn should have a window 24/48 hours either side this would give a window between 3/5 days.**

**Where forest or reserves border private property prescribed burns should take place preferably at three yearly intervals with a maximum five years.**

**This is not done and has been given a low priority from both local and state government.**

**We need to ensure that we have an effective detection and communication system in place.**

**That we allow as many able bodied men and women in to fight the fire. We will never have enough bush fire brigade members or paid fire fighters therefore others should be encouraged to learn fire fighting skills even if this is to mop up after.**

**Prevention and early warning.**

**FESA in West Australia is the government organisation charged with protecting lives and property in its role it is meant to keep abreast of modern fire fighting techniques, training of personal and implementing the best technology.**

**Its Mission statement: to improve community safety practices; and Provide timely, quality and effective emergency services.**

**Amongst their stated values is to: Act with Integrity and Honesty, to put the community first and to have open and honest two-way communication.**

**FESA's Management have shown in the past fifteen months to have practiced none of the above.**

**It chooses to ignore best fire fighting techniques, its training whilst having a large budget is short on effectiveness.**

**Whilst being aware of better fire fighting materials and early warning equipment such as Kill Fire and Fire Watch consciously chooses to ignore such material and equipment.**

**Fire Watch has been deployed in Germany for over eight years it has helped reduced their forest burnings by 90% this is not new technology it is over eight years old.**

**Kill Fire has been proven to extinguish fires quicker using up to 50% less water and to be environmentally safer than current retardants employed with knock out rates far superior and with a cost saving of around 30/40% it is not new being in service in excess of twelve years, it is even stocked by FESA but used only for what one FESA officer said "was for real emergencies" yet it is not used generally by FESA .**

**It is interesting to note that KILL FIRE was used by one bushfire brigade for the fire season 2006/2007 in which they attended,**

**A similar number of fires.  
Spent 50% less time at the fire front  
Used less than 60% water at front  
Spent zero time in mopping up,  
And zero water and time for cleaning equipment after fires.**

**Their report to FESA was scuttled whilst brigades are able to use Kill fire they will not be reimbursed, effectively taking it away from fire crews and putting their lives at greater risk.**

**FESA do not practice best bushfire management and functions with little credible Accountability, to the community or Government.**

**Since its inception we have lost more homes and have had a greater area of land damaged than in the previous fifty years.**

**In 1978 the south west was hit by the tail end of Cyclone Alby wind speed was extremely high and lightning started many fires, (I myself was trapped for several hours in one of those fire) the fires would burn out in excess of 114,000 hectares six buildings were lost and sadly two lives were lost.**

**The reason for the low toll in lives and buildings lost was due to an all out participation by residents, and emergency personnel working together effectively.**

**The budget for FESA today is greater than at any time previous every property has a FESA levy plus the organisation receives other funds yet its efficiency has declined.**

**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 has been a lot said re - allowing homes to be built in bush settings along the way conveniently forgotten is that since settlement people have lived in the bush, have lived with and fought bush fires, what has changed in the past few years here in Western Australia is the way that we fight fires.**

**Whereas in the past, all hands available fought and suppressed the fire from the beginning.**

**Today residents are of the mistaken belief that the fire brigades are there to protect their property, residents are encouraged to leave and in some circumstance ordered to leave and when they do so, believe that the fire brigades FESA will protect or do all in their power to protect their property.**

**Farmers and volunteers have been turned away from the fires because they did not have flashing lights etc on their vehicles and residents are not allowed back into the area to protect their homes and help fight the fire or mop up.**

**In the case of the Roleystone/Kelmscott fire, FESA fire units that were on their way were told they were not required.**

**We need to get some common sense back into the equation,**

**Fire does not understand Government Laws; it does not stand still until some controller thinks that he/she has enough resources to challenge it.**

**Fire does not discriminate, Research has taught us a lot, i.e. we know generally at what speed the fire will run we know the spread it is likely to follow etc.**

**Property owners have to take and be given more responsibility, need to know that emergency service FESA cannot, and will not necessarily come to their aid**

**in case of fire. There will never be enough personal in full time or volunteer service. It should be noted here that there are few full time personal in bush fire brigades.**

**As such there needs to be coordination between government agencies especially the Environmental agencies, Work safe, Local Government and FESA to ensure that laws are kept to a minimum and do not contradict each other, that under extreme conditions some risk has to be taken, law that gives responsibility back to land owners and residents. That encourages resident participation.**

**At present we are fighting fires using nineteenth century methods with twentieth century bureaucracy when we could and should be using twenty-first century technology.**

**I personally would like to see FESA split up as my enquiries over the past fifteen months; point to substantial irregularities in the way the organisation is run and sourced.**

**The reluctance of the current government, in particular the Premier and Minister responsible for emergency services, to investigate the organisation despite the concerns of many are reprehensible.**

**If FESA is to remain in charge then they should be held far more accountable with investigations into fires and their response being conducted independently of that organisation.**

**With the TOODYAY, LAKE CLIFTON and the ROLYISTONE/KELMSCOTT fires FESA allowed the fires to get out of control,**

**Failed to use material they knew would have ended the fires quicker.**

**Failed to adequately warn residents of the fires.**

**And In the case of all these fires sent residents, who were being advised to leave, into danger.**

**In the case of the Toodyay fire the head of FESA actually had the audacity to lay claim that there were no deaths due to the actions of FESA personal when she was in full knowledge that it was neighbour helping neighbour that resulted in no loss of lives.**

**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.**

**It is my belief that landowners, residents and tenants have a responsibility to reduce bushfire risk on their own property and to minimise the risk to neighbouring properties. But that the number of laws the threat of penalties and enforcement regimes take away their responsibility.**

### **Vegetation clearance,**

**With many land owners that I have spoken to since the Toodyay fire there is an over whelming opinion that they would like to clear more vegetation but are scared under the threat of prosecution if they do so.**

**I myself had the problem a few years ago when I wanted to widen my fire breaks as per regulations I was told by the contractor that he couldn't because it would be violating the environmental laws, the scrub involved was what is commonly known as York poison there was no trees or local fauna involved yet this was the dilemma I was faced with.**

**As a landowner and one who has lived in the country for most of my life I have no wish to destroy the environment and have spent many years taking care of the land I live on.**

**Only to have it destroyed by a fire that firstly could of been prevented,  
Secondly could have been extinguished quicker,  
And thirdly fed bull dust after to, too many of my questions. Even to be told by a FESA officer that there was too much fire load until I pointed out that the load was next to minimum on either side of my home.**

**For myself and all residents I want the responsibility to take care of my property to be responsible for it with the least government interference I believe that the properties destroyed in the past fifteen months were so, because of the way the fires were fought and the protocols deployed.**

### **Evaporative air conditioners**

**A lot has been said over the past few months in relation to fires started after embers have been sucked into Evaporative air conditioners**

**Standards Australia as a matter of urgency should be asked to formulate standards that provides for automatic shutters, which operate immediately power is cut thus ensuring that ambers cannot enter such units.**

Those units that do not have such a system not be installed on homes in bush areas.

#### **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.**

Effective communication of information to residents, currently most shire councils send out bush fire information relating to fire breaks and general obligations, my enquiries reveal that many residents do not read the info, and in listening to residents in the Rollingsstone /Kelmescott fire many did not know what they could have done, this says to me, that clearly the message does not get through.

Now an argument can be made that says that everyone should of know the laws then prosecute offenders, It would however not solve the problem.

I suggest therefore the following, An information pack be given to all new residents moving into bush fire prone areas, with a proviso that all family members over the age of twelve attend a week-end workshop on living in bush fire prone areas.

this would cover clearing, storage of flammable fluids, fire prevention, interpretation of warnings i.e. total fire bans, fire fighting, readiness, evacuation and personal responsibility to self and community.

After attending each adult would sign an awareness pledge. This could be compulsory for all people taken up permanent residency in bush areas excluding current residents but encouraging them to participate,

The course expense should be kept to a minimum charge and adopt the KIS principle.

(If one owns a boat it is no longer permissible to take a boat out without having done a course of competency.) this has made boating safer no reason it would not make living in the bush safer.

My concern here relates to the so called early warning system, in the case of the Toodyay fire 2009 the warning came thru as a text mesg then as a voice recording more than three hours after the fire had been reported and around two hours after my home had been destroyed.

**I have heard similar stories from victims of the Lake Clifton Fire and the Rollingstone / Kelmscott Fire with one couple having received a warning over five hours after their home was destroyed.**

**It is my understanding that the system currently used is operated from the eastern states this being so even though a reported superior system is available here in Western Australia.**

**My investigations show that FESA management have some alliance with the operators of the current system.**

**I believe that the moment a fire is reported a Multimedia System that would alert all residents within a certain radius is activated, that a phone tree be established as back up. (Systems are Available now) but rejected by FESA**

**Such a system would give residents time to dampen down before power was cut also to volunteer on the fire front and help to suppress the fire.**

**An intense fire can exceed a spread rate of 3000 metres per hour.**

**Therefore the alert activation should cover an initial radius of 20 km from the fire point. This can be extended after a controller arrives on scene and makes assessment as to others to be alerted.**

### **In Hill areas.**

**I believe that a system such as Fire Watch should be commissioned ASAP**

**Because fire travels faster up hills that were possible sirens also be installed again activated at initial reporting of fire. Not 3/5 hours after**

**Why because Fire does not wait until all Govt departments are ready to fight it the more hands on deck at the initial stage have proven over the years to extinguish/suppress fire before it gets out of control.**

### **Radio warnings**

**At present in Western Australia the broadcaster of choice is the Local ABC.**

**We have in Western Australia in access of 195 radio stations 50plus in the metro area therefore it stands to reason that everyone is not listening to the ABC.**

**(It is interesting to note that the Rollingstone /Kelmscott fire Radio 6PR kept many informed)**

**I would like to see a system that when there is a fire or any other large scale emergency that all Radio and TV stations within a 50 Km radius of fire or emergency be activated, to sound an alert followed by message at precisely the same time on all stations .**

**This would ensure the maximum number of residents would be alerted to the danger.**

**Such alerts to continue every 10 minutes in the first hour thereafter as decided by controller.**

**Radio stations would be free to broadcast continuing stories if they so wish**

**Keeping evacuated and stay at home residents Informed of emergency progress.**

**In all recent fires those affected have complained of the lack of information given to them, not knowing what is happening adds to the distress I have experienced and witnessed this at Toodyay and witnessed it at Lake Clifton, Roleystone/Kelmscott and the storm ravaged wheat belt noticeably York, residents were treated with contempt by those in control.**

**Clear up to date information should be provided, distributed through different channels i.e. at meetings, radio, and internet and a fact sheet.**

**For those who chose to stay home asap someone needs to be assigned to call on them to see what their needs are, in the recent fires power has been cut they have not been allowed to leave and provided no assistance.**

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

**At present there are many conflicting laws from different Govt department i.e. under the bush fire laws we have to have fire breaks of certain widths clear surrounding areas, under environmental law we cannot remove vegetation without special permission.**

**The burn off laws are set by dates and are not flexible enough to take into consideration adverse weather conditions like late rains, so we have a situation where fire hazard material is present at the highest risk time and residents not allowed to remove or burn it. In the past few years the burn off period has not been extended as such that decision has resulted in higher fire danger.**

**The red tape now expected to get burn off permits outside of burn off periods discourages residents from applying example if one wants to burn an area say 12 metres x10 metres you have to apply for permission have ex number of men available and so on.**

**I believe that the responsibility should be that of the land owner to ensure he/she go about the burning in a sensible way that they inform their neighbours, local council/fire brigade so all know that it is a controlled fire. All of this with the least amount of fuss. (KIS)**

**On preparing for fire season there is one group that may not be able to prepare that is the elderly who have lived all their lives or many years in bush/country areas but because of age are no longer able to do all that is necessary, I suggest that a local register be kept and community or local fire brigades assist them so that they can continue to live where they feel at ease.**

### **In a Nut Shell**

**Give property owners the power to be responsible, to take charge of their property.**

**Provide and encourage fire prevention and suppression training without having to be a member of brigade.**

**Put in place modern fire watch towers.**

**Where possible early warning sirens**

**Have an efficient multimedia early warning system.**

**Followed by an all Radio/TV same time broadcast.**

**As back up encourage, Area Tree phones.**

**Encourage property owners to assist fire fighters this would mean adjusting current OHS laws.**

**Ensure up to date information is distributed via multimedia and other means.**

**At road blocks, with the use of colour bands allow residents into area whilst keeping others out.**

**At evacuation centres keep all informed.**

**Prescribed burns.**

**The use of twenty-first century technologies.**

**An education system in schools informing children of bush fire and how to survive.**

**Training and informative nights for tree change residents.**

**If FESA is broken up**

**Have a state emergency controller together with area controllers.**

**A State Bush Fire Manager who would work with brigades, local shires and property owners.**

**Re-establish:**

**Bush fire brigades**

**Metropolitan fire service**

**State Emergency Service**

**An independent investigative agency to report on fire/emergency response.  
To be transparent.**