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7 SUBMISSION TO MR EUAN FERGUSON AFSM

8 SPECIAL INQUIRER

9 **WAROONA BUSHFIRE PUBLIC INQUIRY**

10 DATED: FEBRUARY 10, 2016

11 Submitted by: [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 Tel. [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16 **Submission Addresses Term of Reference No. 2**

17 **Executive Summary**

18 *“Finally, after each major emergency people talk about lessons learned. They are*  
19 *rarely lessons learned: they are lessons identified. No-one knows whether they have been*  
20 *learned until a similar emergency occurs. More often than not, we find they have not been*  
21 *learned – Tony Moore*

22 The recent history of bushfire inquiries in Western Australia reads like the  
23 popular Bill Murray movie “Groundhog Day” where we are forced to relive the horror of  
24 bushfires over and over and over again until we can finally learn that no amount of reports,  
25 studies, investigation and grand plans can address the problem; until we learn that the  
26 rubber must hit the road.

27 “Thought” via report, submission or inquiry never did anything – he only  
28 “thought” he did. We have seen the all too familiar response to past inquiries ... “the  
29 Committee determined that WA is well placed to respond to bushfires” or “the  
30  
31  
32

1 implementation review has signed off on that one” or “the committee has ticked this box” ...  
2 Yet there has been very little change at the coal face or more particularly, change to fuel  
3 load and risk profile at the Rural Urban Interface (RUI): be it Perth, Sydney or the bush -  
4 settlements like Yarloop and literally hundreds of communities like that in WA are at the  
5 RUI, and in the firing line. Word without action is like a heart with no beat – useless.  
6

7 Mr. Inquirer faces a daunting task, how to make a difference this time, this  
8 time will be different? This time has to be different. The problems of excess fuels in the  
9 forest, excess fuels in the HSZ’s and excess fuels in the BPZ’s, particularly at the RUI have  
10 been identified time and time again. We continue to look the inconvenient truth in the face,  
11 then turn away. A passive indifference that amounts to a willful default. The inconvenient  
12 truth about bushfire mitigation is that it is hard slog. The Productivity Commission found  
13 that governments overinvest in post disaster recovery and reconstruction and underinvest in  
14 mitigation, finding that disaster funding arrangements were inefficient, inequitable,  
15 unsustainable, encouraged cost shifting and impacted on the incentive to manage risks. The  
16 long way of saying what we already know: an ounce of prevention beats a ton of cure.  
17

18 Could \$50 Million per annum make the difference between a livable  
19 environment, adapted to the new climate of bushfire prevalence with resilient communities  
20 at the RUI? The WA Local Government Association may provide the Inquiry with the  
21 independent consultants’ 2014 report on this specific issue.  
22

23 The Perth Hills and the South West of WA are, and will continue to be at an  
24 ever increasing risk of severe bushfires from excess fuels every year: we as a society need to  
25 accept the inevitability of fire and adapt accordingly. We as a species are known for our  
26 ability to adapt, we must adapt to the new bushfire climate. Adapt already settled areas with  
27 housing modifications and adapt the landscape around them to accommodate more Firewise  
28 plantings in the fuel reduced BPZ and HSZ. The majority of Western Australians now live in  
29 formally declared Bushfire Prone Areas, it is not good enough to only apply new rules to new  
30 housing. Ignoring the majority of us who have been allowed by government to build and live  
31  
32

1 in a community by denying us the basic protection of a BPZ and an HSZ would be  
2 inequitable, unjust and dangerous.

3  
4 Were the Inquiry to recommend just two things to protect lives and property  
5 in WA, they would be:

- 6  
7 1. Establishing and maintaining settlement Asset Protection Zones (APZ), say  
8 some 200 M in depth with reduced fuels surrounding all settlements,  
9 hamlets, towns and suburbs in Bush Fire Prone Areas of the state.  
10 2. Mandating the establishment and maintenance of BPZ's and HZS's in  
11 Bushfire Prone Areas in the annual Bushfire Notices issued by LGA's across  
12 WA.

13 **Submission**

- 14  
15  
16 • I have lived [REDACTED] n Roleystone for over 40 years, my house lot is  
17 shown on the edge of the fire ground map provided by the City of  
18 Armadale to the Keelty Inquiry of April 2011. Roleystone, like Yarloop,  
19 was established as a timber town in the late Nineteenth Century yet as a  
20 dormitory suburb of the Perth Hills, its population now exceeds 5,000 at  
21 the RUI. Adjoining road names are indicative: Mills Rd East, Canning  
22 Mills Rd, Barton's Mill Rd, Masons Mill etc. Roleystone is surrounded by  
23 300 degrees of forest and reserve, the remaining 60 degrees connects to  
24 Kelmscott, another suburb with an extensive RUI. In the last 20 years  
25 the fuel loads on Crown, public and private land have steadily increased.  
26 The fuel load in DPaW forest blocks to the East of Roleystone,  
27 Karragullen and Pickering Brook can average dangerous levels, generally  
28 in excess of 10 tonnes and, in some places, exceed 20 tonnes per Ha.  
29 • It appears that nothing has been learnt from the experience in Canberra  
30 in 2003 where a fire, started in forest, raged across the RUI and into  
31 suburbia. I say that because our district was ravaged by a similar fire in  
32 2005 that almost went unnoticed, certainly unnoticed by authorities

1 who appeared to take absolutely no preventative or mitigating measures  
2 in the aftermath. The Perth Hills fire of 2005 raged for days in heavy  
3 forest fuels between Mundaring Weir and Canning Dam. This fire  
4 consumed nearly 30,000 Ha of forest, several kilometers of a major  
5 Truck Route (Canning Road) and threatened hundreds of homes in  
6 Pickering Brook, Karragullen and Roleystone. The fire grounds, if moved  
7 just 15 km westward, would cover a fair swath of metropolitan Perth.  
8 This was a near miss of the luckiest kind, yet nothing was learnt. The  
9 2009 “Bushfire Preparedness Report” made no mention of this fire  
10 virtually on Parliament’s doorstep, saying instead that the State was well  
11 placed to respond to bushfires. Had a proper investigation been carried  
12 out into the 2005 Perth Hills bushfire; the lesson learned about aged  
13 forest fuels at the RUI and subsequent mitigation effected – the 2011  
14 Roleystone Kelmscott fire may have been bought under control with little  
15 damage.

- 16 • An illustrative report of the current bushfire fuel mitigation muddle  
17 appeared in the West Australian Newspaper of February 17, 2014.  
18 Daniel Emerson subtitled his piece “**Landowners could face stringent**  
19 **spot checks of their semirural vegetation, and local councils and**  
20 **State Government entities forced to reduce fuel loads on their land**  
21 **under a sweeping overhaul of WA’s bushfire laws”** Commissioner  
22 Gregson was quoted as saying ... “people who own the fuel need to be  
23 held to account.” And in a rebuke to councils that don’t prescribe burn  
24 their reserves for fear of harming flora or fauna, he warned that to do so  
25 put “a very important species at risk – humans.”. Regrettably, in his  
26 push for new Emergency Services Legislation, the Commissioner  
27 appears to have overlooked his power to direct Local Government  
28 pursuant to the provisions of s. 35 of the Bush Fire Act. To claim no  
29 power pending new legislation may be a fabricated excuse to do nothing.  
30 This paradox was the subject of a Briefing paper sent to the Executive  
31 Officer of SEMC and the Director of the OBRM, with copies to the  
32

1 Commissioner, the Chair of SEMC, the Minister for Emergency Services  
2 and other relevant Ministers. The paper was covered with an email and a  
3 letter of support. There has been no response from the authorities since  
4 the August 2015 paper was sent.

- 5 • Within that same news article, the Commissioner continues the  
6 messaging mantra. “Mr. Gregson called for a consistent approach to fuel  
7 reduction, regardless of who owned the land. “We need to have an  
8 increased focus on the way fuel reduction is managed and overseen and  
9 that people who own the fuel are held to account for reducing that risk.”  
10 He said. “That includes State government instrumentalities, local  
11 government land and private land. Your state of readiness and  
12 preparedness would be much better enhanced if there was an  
13 overarching co-ordination and oversight of that activity”” **Is this “new**  
14 **legislation”, “bigger picture” and “brave new future” pitch any**  
15 **reason to not apply the current powers to effect the now urgently**  
16 **needed fuel reductions on private land? Any tardy State**  
17 **Government landowners can be named, shamed and directed to**  
18 **reduce fuels by Executive Council.**
- 19 • Daniel Emerson’s article goes on to elicit the hidden gem, perhaps the  
20 major reason for this and other recurring inquiries. The terrible truth  
21 being – we know what to do BUT: who pays? ... “WA Local Government  
22 Association President Troy Pickard supported the principle of a uniform  
23 approach to fuel reduction but said the sector lacked the expertise or  
24 funds for the oversight role. “WALGA commissioned independent  
25 analysis which put the cost at approximately \$50 million per annum.”  
26 He said. Local government was not in a position to fund such a cost  
27 without it having an impact on ratepayers.

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29  
30 **The authorities i.e. those with the power and obligation for**  
31 **bushfire safety, know what needs to be done. There have been enough**  
32 **inquiries in the recent past to tell us that bushfire fuel reduction is the**

1           **primary element of bushfire mitigation. Yet little has been done at the**  
2           **RUI. Consultants were engaged to study the issue and cost the fuel**  
3           **reduction. What is holding up the implementation in Western Australia – a**  
4           **mere \$50 Million per annum?**

- 6           • A major impediment to implementing other bushfire inquiry  
7           recommendations concerning the RUI are recalcitrant Local Government  
8           Authorities. The responses of the City of Armadale and the Shire of  
9           Waroona to the Keelty recommendations are simply shameful. The City  
10          of Armadale (CoA) considered Keelty R17, under the report heading  
11          “Current Options for Reducing Fuel Loads at Properties in Bushland  
12          Settings.” Under the sub head 2.1 The City states:  
13          ... **“Clearing of native vegetation on a property is one means of**  
14          **reducing fuel loads, however for obvious reasons is not**  
15          **encouraged.”** See the CoA Technical Services Minutes of meeting  
16          September 5, 2011.
- 17          • At Keelty R38 Local governments were to institute a comprehensive  
18          program to assess fuel loads and bushfire preparedness on private  
19          properties. The program was to give reference to the creation and  
20          maintenance of a Building Protection Zone, in line with FESA guidelines.  
21          This program was to be implemented and managed under the *Bush Fires*  
22          *Act 1954* in a manner similar to the fire break inspection program. The  
23          CoA Fire Break Notice remains unaltered from 2010 to current date,  
24          there is no reference to fuel load, let alone the creation and maintenance  
25          of a BPZ as per Keelty R38.
- 26          • The Waroona Bushfire Advisory Committee and the Director Corporate  
27          services recommended to the Waroona Shire Council meeting of July 26,  
28          2011 the need for property owners to incorporate a Building Protection  
29          Zone (BPZ) around assets. A circle of safety around all buildings in the  
30          district, via the issue of Fire Control Notices under s.33 of the *Bush Fire*  
31          *Act 1954*. The Officer recommendation stated that: “A BPZ, or Circle of  
32

1 Safety is a 20-meter area of reduced ground fuels, scrub and tree limbs  
2 immediately surrounding all buildings. This involves clearing all  
3 rubbish, long dry grass, dense scrub, pruning lower branches (up to two  
4 meters above the ground) and all tree limbs that hang over buildings.  
5 Reduced fuel levels will lower the fire intensity and reduce the spread of  
6 fire (flame contact and/or radiant heat transfer) threatening any  
7 building.” **At its meeting July 2011, the Council of the Shire of**  
8 **Waroona unanimously rejected the officer and Committee**  
9 **recommendation to incorporate BPZ’s in the annual Fire Control**  
10 **Notices. Such a bald rejection of a major Keelty finding may have**  
11 **exacerbated the losses in the Shire and beyond in January 2016.**

- 12 • The Premier certainly recognized the importance of BPZs around  
13 buildings and infrastructure. Perhaps sensing some flagging appetite for  
14 their installation and/or maintenance, the Premier issued Premiers  
15 Circular 2012/02 on September 3, 2012. It concluded with the following  
16 paragraph: “To demonstrate the shared responsibility of reducing  
17 bushfire risk in Western Australia, local governments, government  
18 trading enterprises, other owners of critical infrastructure and private  
19 property owners with critical assets and homes in high bushfire risk  
20 areas are being encouraged implement or improve existing BPZs prior to  
21 the 2012-13 bushfire season. There is no evidence on the ground, in the  
22 media or in the annual Bush Fire Notices of the City of Armadale or the  
23 Shires of Waroona or Harvey regarding the implementation or  
24 maintenance of any BPZs.  
25

### 26 **Conclusion**

27 A shared responsibility is not someone else’s responsibility. It appears that the parties in  
28 Western Australia are “talking” bushfire preparedness yet none are “walking the talk”.  
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1 There is a leadership mantra of messaging and no more, each level of leadership “talks past”  
2 the next level, from Premiers Circular on down the chain of command. No one in authority is  
3 taking ownership. To mark the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kelmscott Roleystone fire, Minister  
4 Francis overflow the fire grounds which 7News broadcast on January 2, 2016, what he saw  
5 clearly shocked him into a scalding criticism. There was less than 5% observance of the BPZ  
6 rules, yet this LGA believes it is doing a good job, having just reported a greater than 90%  
7 compliance on inspection. A credibility gap so great as to beggar belief. Messaging or  
8 haranguing never mitigated a single fire, only leadership and ground work mitigate  
9 bushfires. Bushfires in Australia have increased by more than 40% since 2007, an  
10 incredible CSIRO 61 Team statistic released today: action is needed now.

11  
12 **What of the sustainability of re-building Yarloop? Houses may be built to the**  
13 **requirements of AS3959, yet will the requisite BPZs and HSZs be maintained and**  
14 **enforced? It appears that the current leadership and its messaging malaise are not up**  
15 **to the task. Are individual BPZs and HSZs sufficient? Is a settlement ASZ of 200**  
16 **meters deep required around the new town? Who will maintain and enforce this safety**  
17 **measure? Even a shared responsibility needs clear leadership, defined roles,**  
18 **accountability and shared ownership of the outcomes.**

19  
20 **It may be said that the cost of administrative failure in bushfire preparedness can be**  
21 **high in human and monetary terms; but not the least cost, is a loss of faith from the**  
22 **community and its volunteer workforce in this leadership and administration. The**  
23 **Fire and Emergency Services and the State, cannot afford to lose such a valuable**  
24 **resource. Mitigation via fuel reduction and rapid, on the ground response from our**  
25 **motivated Bush Fire Brigades are the essential and primary elements of our fire**  
26 **defense.**

27  
28 Thank you for the opportunity to put this submission.

29 Dated this 10th day of February, 2016.

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 10 February 2016 2:46 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** Yarloop fire

**Categories:** Blue Category

Hello

My name is [REDACTED] I live at [REDACTED]. On the night of the fire, January 7, my wife [REDACTED] and I stayed to defend our home, thankfully we were successful. We suffered some damage to fencing, reticulation and a melted pump and while the situation was dicey for a bit, all in all we came out relatively unscathed.

We had access to water

We have an access point to the Harvey irrigation scheme on our block, without this we would not have been able to save our house. We were able to connect hoses to taps I had installed around the block and put out the fires.

I do not know what occurred in the town site but as I was fighting the blaze down our eastern fence line I could see fire trucks 150 metres away, standing idle on the oval. I'll admit at the time I was quite angry about it as I really could have used some help. I learned later that they did not have any water and it is this fact which causes me to write this submission.

On our property we have a reasonably good sized dam, access to the Harvey irrigation scheme and a 100,000 litre rainwater tank with a quick connect fire hose coupling but no one knew. No one who could have used that information properly that is.

I believe local brigades should regularly conduct an audit of available resources to identify sources of and access to water in emergency situations. It may be of benefit to have that information held in a statewide database so all relevant personnel have access to that data.

Thank you

[REDACTED]

## Submission – Public Inquiry into January 2016 Waroona Fire

Submitted by [REDACTED]

Residential stakeholders, submission contributors to the Keelty Review of the 2011 Perth Hills bushfire

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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This submission responds to Terms of Reference 2 and 3.

### ***Tackling the unresolved issue: Adapting the landscape to make ‘legacy’ townsites, peri-urban housing and critical infrastructure more defensible from bushfires***

#### **Background**

We do not live in the 2016 Waroona fire zone, but our residential property was in the thick of the 2011 Roleystone/Kelmscott Hills bushfire that destroyed 72 homes and damaged many more, including ours. We have a vested interest in the implementation of the 2011 Keelty Inquiry recommendations and regard ourselves as stakeholders in ongoing bushfire risk mitigation across the peri-urban landscape.

In 2011, our home and other assets were damaged but successfully defended from bushfire attack over about 12 hours through a combination of the following passive and active measures:

- A perimeter, steel panel fence prevented ground fires from penetrating our property from three sides (many of the homes lost in 2011 did not have a barrier fence or wall)
- Proven Firewise, deciduous tree plantings and an absence of volatile vegetation on our plot passively shielded the most vulnerable parts of the home from attack through the passage of the fire front.
- For the rest of the afternoon and that evening, the property was actively defended from continuing ember attack and spot fires by a capable neighbour and his son. Those 2 individuals used available garden hoses, an uninterrupted mains water supply and persistence to actively defend at least 7 properties in our street, including our own. We learned from the experience not to take the supply of power and water for granted.

Just as with the instructive Canberra bushfire in 2003, many of the homes that were lost in our immediate surroundings in 2011 were built from inherently robust materials but they were susceptible to spot fires and ember attack because they were not actively defended, had little or no barrier fencing and they were surrounded by volatile eucalypts, native shrubs and ground fuels.

## Lessons Learned from Previous Bushfire Emergencies

In his Review of the 2011 Perth Hills bushfire, Mick Keelty correctly identified the fundamental need to systematically manage fuels and the proximity of housing to those fuels throughout the peri-urban landscape. He also exposed the avoidable consequences of leaving homes undefended.

Five years on and by any objective measure, fuel levels and bushfire risk through proximity of established homes to native bushland and a closely spaced eucalypt canopy throughout much of the Perth Hills is at least as bad as it was in 2011. The extent of the hazard is nothing short of diabolical.

To paraphrase Joe Francis, the Minister for Emergency Services in his recent Channel 7 TV news flight over the 2011 Kelmscott Hills-Roleystone fire zone, **housing and bushland are enmeshed, so little wonder that bushfires travel unhindered from one to the other**. He observed that people ought to be using chainsaws to remove dangerous, fire fuelling vegetation from around homes.

We accept that bushfires are a natural and recurring phenomenon in the Australian landscape and we know that we got lucky in 2011. What is hard to accept is that bushfires should be allowed to routinely obliterate communities, essential infrastructure and irreplaceable heritage in Kelmscott-Roleystone, Margaret River, Parkerville and Yarloop because we as a society do not want to accept the shared responsibility for managing fuel levels in the landscape and for breaking fuel continuity at the peri-urban interface.

More specifically, little or nothing of any consequence is being done on the ground at the peri-urban interface to adequately separate established communities from the inherently explosive Australian bush. This is the veritable 'elephant in the room' issue across southern Australia.

Sylvia Hallam, in her book titled *Fire and Hearth* (2014) and Bill Gammage in his book titled *The Biggest Estate on Earth – How Aborigines Made Australia* (2011) have demonstrated beyond question through fastidious historical research that the bushland around our capital cities and regional towns is denser and less open than it was prior to European settlement. Aborigines systematically managed the landscape with fire to keep it accessible, productive and relatively safe from uncontrollable fire particularly over the last 10,000 years. We cannot exactly replicate what they did, but we can learn from their historic legacy in the way that we manage a more open and safer landscape.

Instead, all three tiers of government and a raft of community organisations have for decades been working to re-instate an often confected and contiguous bush landscape within the critical peri-urban interface and back into housing areas and townsites. It may be well-intentioned and roundly applauded in the media, schools and academic planning circles, but it is a fundamentally flawed concept because it undermines the primacy of human life in land use risk management.

In this context it is not possible to fully combat bushfire risk within individual property boundaries. Nevertheless, we have been working to improve the bushfire resilience of our own property since 2009. We have a written fire plan, an independent water supply, fire pump, hoses, generator, sprinkler system, protective gear and we test our system regularly during summer. We are doing what we can to harden and retrofit our 1970's house. But from real bushfire experience at home, we understand that our biggest threat lies beyond our boundaries in adjoining private property and in the bushland beyond that accommodates a near contiguous and highly inflammable cover of remnant eucalypts and unmanaged understorey.

Commentators often say that this dilemma would be readily resolved if those who live at the rural/urban interface simply abandoned their properties on the outskirts and moved back into the urban fold. But by definition, there will always be an interface. What we need to do is to make the interface safer and more defensible from bushfires. This was not the case at Yarloop.

In this context, possibly the most compelling and instructive piece of research to emerge from the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires was the work done by Risk Frontiers (2010) for the Bushfire CRC titled, "Bushfire Penetration into Urban Areas in Australia: A Spatial Analysis."

It found that approximately 85% of all the homes lost to bushfires in Australia have been situated within 100 metres of bushland. By extension, it should be possible to set a minimum Hazard Separation distance that would greatly protect most established homes and townsites at the interface, irrespective of all other factors.

So a minimum 100 + metre wide Strategic Bushfire Buffer or Hazard Separation Zone (HSZ) at the peri-urban interface would protect most homes or at least bring down the Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) to a level that would make active defence of individual properties feasible.

In more closely settled peri-urban areas and for townsites like Yarloop, a retrospective HSZ cannot feasibly be achieved within the limited area of individual residential properties, but it could and should be implemented around vulnerable townsites, along the edge of established peri-urban communities and around essential infrastructure like bridges and public utilities.

Governments should commit to mobilising the necessary resources to implement this Bushfire Buffer Concept as a mandatory measure without further delay or procrastination. It would save far more than it costs to mobilise and respond to uncontrollable bushfires every summer and it would have far less net impact on the landscape and environment.

With adaptive urban design consistent with OBRM's Bushfire Prone Area mapping standard, planners and resource managers could delineate effective Bushfire Buffers that comprise an inter-connected chain of reticulated orchards, cleared road reserves, sports fields, golf courses, arboretums and traditional cleared fire breaks. According to the research, such Buffers would dramatically reduce the likelihood of ember attack and direct flame contact and would enable active defence of assets by either prepared property owners or authorised fire fighters.

The implementation of Strategic Bushfire Buffers would underpin and complement fuel reduction measures on either side of the peri-urban interface.

### **Government leadership**

We acknowledge the State Government's substantial investment in bushfire response, better planning and the allocation of more resources to try to combat bushfires since the release of the Keelty Reports of 2011 and 2012.

In this regard, we expect that the Government and its agencies will get on with the effective implementation of OBRM's Bushfire Risk Management Plans (BRMP's) across LGA's, leading to a comprehensive and sustained programme of fuel reduction in public and private bushland and on semi-rural landholdings that adjoin long established and vulnerable residential communities.

The Strategic Bushfire Buffer or HSZ concept referred to in this submission should be incorporated into BRMP's as a mandatory requirement – similar in effect to the way that we plan and mobilise when faced with other existential threats.

**In summary**, to complement a systematic and disciplined program of fuel reduction in adjoining bushland and semi-rural tenures, landscape adaptation within and adjoining established housing areas should include:

- the implementation of mandatory, minimum 100 + metre wide Strategic Bushfire Buffers, including plantings of 'Firewise' species to break fuel continuity at the rural/urban interface
- the targeted removal of highly flammable species of trees and shrubs from around houses on a tenure blind basis to achieve defendable BAL's
- shade and amenity tree replacement, where appropriate, with strategically located and arranged 'Firewise' species. Particular attention should be paid to 'Firewise' shade and street tree planting
- integration of a 'Firewise' Landscape Adaptation (FLA) strategy with the strategic, policy and statutory frameworks of State & Local Governments to eliminate the ongoing adoption of conflicting landscape and environmental measures.

There is a great deal of published material and expertise to draw upon, including the easy to follow "Landscaping for Bushfires" document published by the Victorian CFA in 2012.

Implementation of peri-urban Landscape Adaptation will best be achieved in conjunction with effective community engagement. In this regard, models such as the American "Firewise Communities" initiative have demonstrated a capacity to cut through complacency and buck passing to achieve tangible outcomes with a shared sense of responsibility.

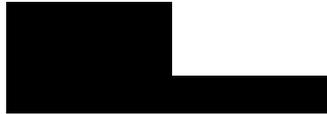
We are looking to the government through SEMC and OBRM to provide similar leadership and energy to drive this fundamental, yet largely ignored facet of bushfire risk reduction which has the capacity to significantly reduce the cost and impact of bushfires on the lives of many thousands of people living in long established homes and communities at the peri-urban interface in Western Australia.

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8<sup>th</sup> February 2016

# Submission to The Independent Review of the Waroona Fire in January 2016.

Submitted by :



## **Item 1 (a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities**

### **Controlled burns**

This fire was proof that the fuel loads were much too high. Several factors have contributed to the lack of controlled burning and one of the primary factors is the extreme level of complexity that is required by DFES and DPAW to manage such burns. This complexity is driven by fear that someone may be blamed if there is an accident of any kind.

Risk tolerance by authorities and government has become so low that there has been insufficient burning for many years. There is an urgent need to return the right of landholders to burn their own properties and get the bureaucrats out of the way. We also need to return to local brigades the authority to burn where they judge it to be safe without requiring the current extreme level of reporting which has effectively stopped all controlled burning by volunteers. DFES should be there to back them up if it all goes wrong, not to blame them for doing their best for their communities.

The Department of Main Roads and local shires also need to maintain road verges to minimise fuel loads. Such maintenance is almost totally lacking in most country shires because of the high cost, but it is observable that the fire ran along verges in many places and could probably have been stopped if the fuel loads were lower.

### **Item 1g (ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire**

Problems with DFES web site

Warnings were long and verbose with little or no indication of what had changed since the previous warning. There has been some attempt with the subsequent Uduc fire to highlight changes but without access to the previous warning, it is not possible to understand the changes in detail. It is clearly not possible for people under severe stress to remember details of something they read an hour or more ago and grasp what has changed. There are excellent models for highlighting changes in software such as word processors and there is no reason why such models cannot be applied to these warnings. An example of a warning with changes marked is attached as Appendix A.

The DFES web site is very narrow, possibly following an old standard for web design. It also has menu panels on both sides, reducing the number of words in the warning panel to approximately thirteen. There are more than 900 words in one typical warning and this very narrow layout makes it difficult to read. The layout and wording is also not user friendly and does not make use of hyperlinks to guide users to important sections. A simplified warning in PDF format using internal and external hyperlinks is attached as Appendix B to illustrate how much easier it could be made for people to read.

The warnings often use road or locality names that are inappropriate or wrong. There were several instances of this during the Waroona fire but as the warnings are no longer publicly available, these

instances cannot be quoted with certainty. However the following examples will illustrate the problem:

- The recent fire near John Tognella rest area was originally described as John Forrest rest area. This was interpreted by at least one person who spoke to me as being John Forrest National Park in Mundaring in the hills district east of Perth.
- The warning area was defined by a road name that does not exist on Google Maps but appears to be Doman Road. Another boundary of this fire was given as a Nature Reserve that also does not appear on Google Maps and is not signposted on Forrest Highway.
- The boundary of the fire at Uduc included "...west of Hocart Road and South West Highway...". Hocart Road is a minor road that runs north and south to the west of South West Highway. Any location west of Hocart Road is also west of South West Highway so including both roads in the definition of the area is confusing. The map provided with the alert illustrates the area that was intended to be defined and the wording should have been along the following lines:
  - West of Hocart Road from Uduc Road to Wokalup
  - West of South Western Highway from Wokalup to Mitchell Road

Maps of the alert areas such as those provided on the emergencyaus.info web site make the alerts much more understandable and DFES should adopt this system. There has been some attempt by DFES to provide maps for later fires but they have several problems:

- the maps are not included with all warnings
- the link to the map is at the very bottom of the warning in extremely small font
- they are in low resolution PDF format and it is not possible to read features such as minor road names

Broadcasts by the ABC had the additional problem that they were read very quickly, giving no opportunity to understand how the situation was changing.

### **Road closures – treatment of people by police**

Wind was from the NE and predicted to stay that direction until Monday 11/1. One of the things that the BOM does extremely well is the prediction of wind speed and direction. As the winds follow isobars which are easily measured, the BOM's forecasts are virtually 100% accurate. This wind direction made it highly unlikely that the fire would reach Old Bunbury Road and virtually certain that it would not affect the northern parts of Lake Clifton or any part of Herron.

There was never a need to close Old Coast Road at Lakeside Parkway. The DFES warning site also called this Lakeside Road when it was first closed and this continued for most of the next day. This was extremely confusing to people who know the area and also understood that the road did not need to be closed so far to the north.

There is a huge number of examples of police excluding people from the closed areas without exercising any discretion. These include:

- Volunteers attempting to join their brigades
- DFES personnel in uniform and driving DFES vehicles attempting to relieve incident controllers
- Brigade captain prevented from obtaining fuel for a fire appliance (this was eventually allowed PROVIDED that he returned before change of police shift – this would have been easy to manage if the police concerned had tried just a little bit)
- Mother prevented from entering to evacuate children who were home alone
- Truck from Geraldton called to help evacuate 7,000 cattle. Police officer was extremely aggressive and driver was arrested and only released when the CBFCO vouched for him and had to give personal details including date of birth.

One solution to this problem would be to re-introduce ID cards for brigade members and others who should be allowed to cross road blocks. The argument against ID cards is that they are very difficult to introduce because they require photographs and bureaucrats say this needs to be managed centrally.

There is no need to apply the same stringent standards to such photographs as are used for passports and brigade officers should be permitted to certify photographs. Alternatively, Australia Post could be tasked with taking and certifying photographs as they already do for some identity cards.

### **Lack of concern for people**

Most of the evacuations in Lake Clifton and all of those in Herron were unnecessary because of the prevailing and predicted winds and caused trauma to many people. Several of the people who were evacuated were

- elderly
- infirm
- mothers with fly in fly out partners
- single parents

and all were still traumatised by the fire that swept Lake Clifton in 2011. Being evacuated was exceptionally traumatic for many of them and the lack of detail in the official warnings added to their trauma. Once they had left the area and were not allowed to return, they had very little official information on what was happening. There was a great deal of talk on social media, some of which was incorrect, adding further to their stress.

Evacuation warnings were sent to Waroona residents at 3am. At least one senior lady was advised by local police to ignore the warning and that he would let her know if they needed to leave. This is good country policing but reflects very poorly on the DFES warning system.

There was no attempt to provide food or shelter to the people of Preston Beach who spent two days on the beach. Water was supplied but nothing more. There was also no attempt to evacuate people by water using the Water Police, Volunteer Sea Rescue or helicopters.

### **Discussion**

DFES is very concerned about stress and trauma related psychological problems for its staff and volunteers but there is no apparent concern from any government body for residents who have been traumatised unnecessarily.

The modern approach of allocating blame for every unfortunate event which is driven by the media, the legal fraternity and insurance companies is creating a nanny state which is totally against the Australian tradition of looking after ourselves and our neighbours. We live in a country where danger is ever present and the modern attitude of attempting to eliminate such dangers is never going to work. Instead, people need to be encouraged to make their own decisions on the basis of good information and this means that the warning systems need to be made much more accurate, targeted and understandable.

Authorities such as DFES and Police are staffed by humans who have a very strong drive to exercise power over people. There is a need to curb this power or at least ensure that those who ultimately exercise it are responsible and caring. This was obviously not the case in many instances during this emergency.

Platitudes such as “better safe than sorry” are not acceptable. That type of excuse may make authorities sound as though they do care about people but in reality their propensity to evacuate people is really about making their jobs simpler and ensuring that there is no possibility that they can be held accountable for deaths.

### **Recommendations**

- Get rid of the attitude of evacuating people “just in case”
- Need major overhaul to DFES web site, how warnings are written and promulgated to highlight changes.
- Use language in warnings that is accurate and not contradictory
- DFES should provide maps like those available at the emergencyaus.com web site

- Change the wording of phone and text messages so that they define the area that is actually threatened rather than the scatter gun approach that is currently used.
- Senior police need to instruct officers to use discretion and do their jobs with sympathy and compassion rather than being overbearing.
- Introduce ID cards for brigade members and others who should be allowed to cross road blocks.
- Provide psychological support for people who were traumatised by unnecessary evacuations.

### **Item 3 The need for further reform**

There are several single access settlements, particularly along our coast line such as Preston Beach, Myalup and Binningup. This fire demonstrated the danger inherent in such settlements and the Government should ensure that no similar situations are created in future. Secondary escape routes should also be provided to those existing settlements.

## APPENDIX A – DFES alert with changes marked

Bushfire WATCH AND ACT for southern part of Uduc, including Wokalup, in the Shire of Harvey  
Tuesday 9 February 2016 - 11:56 AM

*\*Please note changes under power information.*

*\* Please note there is currently widespread mobile phone coverage issues:*

- DFES is aware of this issue that is affecting 3G voice calling (mobile-mobile). Calls to triple zero aren't affected;
- Our alerts and warnings will continue to contain the latest information;
- If the mobile phone outage affects people in the area, the community is urged to listen to the radio and be extra vigilant of their surroundings;
- As always, the community is reminded to stay-up-to date by checking information from a range of sources including their immediate surroundings, DFES website and 13 DFES information line. Do not rely on receiving an Emergency Alert Telephone Warning (text message);
- If you see smoke or flames you need to act immediately and take action for your own safety.

**A bushfire WATCH AND ACT remains for people in an area south of Forestry Road and Uduc Road, west of Hocart Road and South Western Highway, north of Mitchell Road and Treasure Road and east of Forrest Highway.**

**This includes Wokalup townsite, Thornton Housing Estate and Myalup Freshwater Lakes Estate in the Shire of Harvey.**

- There is a possible threat to lives and homes if the fire breaches containment lines.
- The community needs to remain vigilant as conditions may change.
- You need to leave or get ready to actively defend.
- Pockets of unburnt vegetation are burning within the fire area.
- Forecast wind and heat over the next 24 hours are expected to produce challenging conditions for firefighters.

**BUSHFIRE BEHAVIOUR:**

- The bushfire is contained but not controlled.
- The fire is currently stationary.
- Wind changes are expected to occur throughout the day.

**WHAT TO DO:**

- If you are not prepared or you plan to leave, leave now if the way is clear.

- If you are well prepared and plan to actively defend your home, make final preparations now.
- If you are not at home, do not try to return as conditions in the area could be very dangerous.

#### SAFER PLACE:

- Your safest option may be to visit family or friends who live away from the area.
- Please ensure you take ample water and look after yourself, your family and pets during the hot weather.

#### SAFEST ROUTE:

- People in the Uduc area should leave via Forestry Road heading eastwards towards Harvey away from the fire.
- People in Myalup Lakes Estate should leave in a westerly direction towards Forrest Highway away from the fire.
- People north of Herbert Road and Rodgers Road should leave in a northerly direction away from the fire if safe to do so.
- People south of Herbert Road and Rodgers Road should leave in a southerly direction away from the fire if safe to do so.

#### EVACUATION CENTRE:

The Department of Child Protection and Family Support has set up a temporary evacuation centre at the Leschenault Leisure Centre on Leisure Drive, Australind.

#### COMMUNITY MEETING:

A community meeting will be held at 12:00pm today at the Leschenault Leisure Centre on Leisure Drive, Australind.

#### ALERT LEVEL:

**A bushfire ADVICE remains for people in an area south of Uduc Road and Harvey-Quindanning Road, west of Staples Road and Hadfield Road, north of Sandalwood Road and east of South Western Highway and Hocart Road. This includes the Harvey townsite.**

**A bushfire ADVICE remains for people in an area south of Crampton Road, west of Field Road, north of Forestry Road and east of Forrest Highway.**

**A bushfire ADVICE remains for people in an area south of Finn Road, west of Forrest Highway and north of Valentine Road, including the townsites of Myalup and Binningup.**

**A bushfire ADVICE remains for people in an area south of Treasure Road, west of Campbell Road, north of Marriott Road and east of Forrest Highway.**

Although there is no immediate danger for people in these areas you need to be aware and keep up to date.

#### WHAT TO DO:

- Stay alert and monitor your surroundings.
- Watch for signs of a bushfire, especially smoke and flames.
- Read through your bushfire survival plan.
- If you do not have a plan decide what you will do if the situation gets worse.

#### ROAD CLOSURES:

Avoid the area and be aware of fire and other emergency services personnel working on site

The following roads are closed:

- Forestry Road at Forrest Highway
- Wellesley Road North at Treasure Road
- Wellesley Road North at Forrest Highway
- Pead Road at Forrest Highway
- Myalup Beach Road at Forrest Highway
- Myalup Road at Thornton Drive
- Rodgers Road at Government Road
- Leitch Road at Government Road

Other roads in the vicinity may also be closed.

Road information may also be available from Main Roads WA by calling 138 138 or visiting [www.mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au)

#### PREPARE FOR HOT DAYS AHEAD:

With hot temperatures and warm nights expected in the coming days you need to take precautions to avoid heat stress. For more information visit the Department of Health website at [www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au).

## POWER:

- Western Power advises that the fire is affecting the electricity supply for customers in the South West.
- Supply has been restored to affected customers overnight, however, the fire is burning near transmission lines that serve the region and power poles may have been damaged.
- For information on power interruptions, please visit Western Power's website at [www.westernpower.com.au](http://www.westernpower.com.au)

## WHAT FIREFIGHTERS ARE DOING:

- Firefighters are protecting houses and infrastructure in the area.
- Approximately 150 firefighters from DFES, Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, Bush Fire Service, and the Department of Parks and Wildlife are on scene.
- Firefighters are strengthening containment lines, mopping up and patrolling the fire boundary.

## EXTRA INFORMATION:

- The fire was reported at 2.30pm on 7 February 2016.
- The size of the fire is approximately 1120 hectares.
- The cause of the fire is unknown.
- DFES is managing the fire with the assistance of an interagency management team.

## IMPORTANT NUMBERS:

People who have been affected by the fire are encouraged to register with the Red Cross at [register.redcross.org.au](http://register.redcross.org.au) or at an evacuation centre. People who wish to enquire about the location of family or friends can do so online at [register.redcross.org.au](http://register.redcross.org.au).

## KEEP UP TO DATE:

Visit [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), call 13 DFES (13 3337), follow DFES on Twitter @dfes\_wa, listen to ABC local radio, or news bulletins.

**Updates will be provided every two hours unless the situation changes.**

## Additional Information

Please note:

 [325934\\_Myalup\\_Public\\_Info\\_A4\\_20160209\\_0930](#) (PDF - 661 KB)

## APPENDIX B – DFES alert with hyperlinks and improved readability

Tuesday 9 February 2016 - 11:56 AM

### **Bushfire WATCH AND ACT for southern part of Uduc and Wokalup, in the Shire of Harvey**

#### **AREA AFFECTED:**

- **South of Forestry Road and Uduc Road**
- **West of Hocart Road from Uduc Road to Wokalup**
- **West of South Western Highway from Wokalup to Mitchell Road**
- **North of Mitchell Road and Treasure Road**
- **East of Forrest Highway.**

#### **ALSO INCLUDED IN THIS ALERT (may be outside the roads listed above):**

- **Wokalup townsite**
- **Thornton Housing Estate**
- **Myalup Freshwater Lakes Estate**

#### **LINKS**

[Bushfire Advice for surrounding areas](#)

[Map](#)

[Road closures](#)

#### **CHANGES SINCE PREVIOUS ALERT**

- [power information](#)
- [IMPORTANT INFORMATION re mobile phones](#)

#### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

*There is currently widespread mobile phone coverage issues:*

- DFES is aware of this issue that is affecting 3G voice calling (mobile-mobile). Calls to triple zero aren't affected;
- Our alerts and warnings will continue to contain the latest information;
- If the mobile phone outage affects people in the area, the community is urged to listen to the radio and be extra vigilant of their surroundings;

#### **BUSHFIRE BEHAVIOUR:**

- The bushfire is contained but not controlled.
- The fire is currently stationary.
- Wind changes are expected to occur throughout the day.

#### **ROAD CLOSURES:**

***Avoid the area and be aware of fire and other emergency services personnel working on site***

The following roads are closed:

- Forestry Road at Forrest Highway
- Wellesley Road North at Treasure Road
- Wellesley Road North at Forrest Highway
- Pead Road at Forrest Highway
- Myalup Beach Road at Forrest Highway
- Myalup Road at Thornton Drive
- Rodgers Road at Government Road
- Leitch Road at Government Road

Other roads in the vicinity may also be closed.

Road information may also be available from Main Roads WA by calling 138 138 or visiting [www.mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au)

#### **WHAT TO DO:**

- As always, the community is reminded to stay-up-to date by checking information from a range of sources including their immediate surroundings, DFES website and 13 DFES information line. Do not rely on receiving an Emergency Alert Telephone Warning (text message);
- If you see smoke or flames you need to act immediately and take action for your own safety.
- There is a possible threat to lives and homes if the fire breaches containment lines.
- The community needs to remain vigilant as conditions may change.
- You need to leave or get ready to actively defend.
- Pockets of unburnt vegetation are burning within the fire area.
- Forecast wind and heat over the next 24 hours are expected to produce challenging conditions for firefighters.
- If you are not prepared or you plan to leave, leave now if the way is clear.
- If you are well prepared and plan to actively defend your home, make final preparations now.
- If you are not at home, do not try to return as conditions in the area could be very dangerous.

#### **SAFER PLACE:**

- Your safest option may be to visit family or friends who live away from the area.
- Please ensure you take ample water and look after yourself, your family and pets during the hot weather.

#### **SAFEST ROUTE:**

- People in the Uduc area should leave via Forestry Road heading eastwards towards Harvey away from the fire.
- People in Myalup Lakes Estate should leave in a westerly direction towards Forrest Highway away from the fire.
- People north of Herbert Road and Rodgers Road should leave in a northerly direction away from the fire if safe to do so.
- People south of Herbert Road and Rodgers Road should leave in a southerly direction away from the fire if safe to do so.

#### **EVACUATION CENTRE:**

The Department of Child Protection and Family Support has set up a temporary evacuation centre at the Leschenault Leisure Centre on Leisure Drive, Australind.

#### **COMMUNITY MEETING:**

A community meeting will be held at 12:00pm today at the Leschenault Leisure Centre on Leisure Drive, Australind.

**Continues on next page**

**A bushfire ADVICE remains for:**

**AREAS AFFECTED**

**East of the Watch and Act area:**

- **South of Uduc Road and Harvey-Quindanning Road**
- **West of Staples Road and Hadfield Road**
- **North of Sandalwood Road**
- **East of South Western Highway**

**North of Watch and Act area:**

- **South of Crampton Road**
- **West of Field Road**
- **North of Forestry Road**
- **East of Forrest Highway.**

**West of Watch and Act area**

- **South of Finn Road**
- **West of Forrest Highway**
- **North of Valentine Road,**

**South of Watch and Act area**

- **South of Treasure Road**
- **West of Campbell Road**
- **North of Marriott Road**
- **East of Forrest Highway.**

**ALSO INCLUDED IN THIS ALERT (may be outside the roads listed above):**

- **Townsites of Harvey, Myalup and Binningup.**

Although there is no immediate danger for people in these areas you need to be aware and keep up to date.

- Stay alert and monitor your surroundings.
- Watch for signs of a bushfire, especially smoke and flames.
- Read through your bushfire survival plan.
- If you do not have a plan decide what you will do if the situation gets worse.

**PREPARE FOR HOT DAYS AHEAD:**

With hot temperatures and warm nights expected in the coming days you need to take precautions to avoid heat stress. For more information visit the Department of Health website at [www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au).

**POWER:**

- Western Power advises that the fire is affecting the electricity supply for customers in the South West.
- Supply has been restored to affected customers overnight, however, the fire is burning near transmission lines that serve the region and power poles may have been damaged.
- For information on power interruptions, please visit Western Power's website at [www.westernpower.com.au](http://www.westernpower.com.au)

**WHAT FIREFIGHTERS ARE DOING:**

- Firefighters are protecting houses and infrastructure in the area.
- Approximately 150 firefighters from DFES, Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, Bush Fire Service, and the Department of Parks and Wildlife are on scene.
- Firefighters are strengthening containment lines, mopping up and patrolling the fire boundary.

**EXTRA INFORMATION:**

- The fire was reported at 2.30pm on 7 February 2016.
- The size of the fire is approximately 1120 hectares.

- The cause of the fire is unknown.
- DFES is managing the fire with the assistance of an interagency management team.

**IMPORTANT NUMBERS:**

People who have been affected by the fire are encouraged to register with the Red Cross at [register.redcross.org.au](http://register.redcross.org.au) or at an evacuation centre. People who wish to enquire about the location of family or friends can do so online at [register.redcross.org.au](http://register.redcross.org.au).

**KEEP UP TO DATE:**

Visit [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), call 13 DFES (13 3337), follow DFES on Twitter @dfes\_wa, listen to ABC local radio, or news bulletins.

**Updates will be provided every two hours unless the situation changes.**

Additional Information

Please note:

 [325934\\_Myalup\\_Public\\_Info\\_A4\\_20160209\\_0930](#) (PDF - 661 KB)

## Submission to Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

By introduction, I am a geologist and a botanist and have Environmental Management qualifications as well. I have mainly worked in the oil & gas exploration industry. I have lived in Perth, Adelaide and Jakarta and now over 8 years in Margaret River. I have been a member of the Wallcliffe Bush Fire Brigade for about 5 years.

My first observation is that of the culture of DPaW and FESA that being career people, they are unable to properly co-opt and utilise the volunteer services.

The primary cause of the Margaret River Bushfire was the lack of allocating night patrols of the burn they were trying to establish south of Gracetown. It was their burn but they had no one watching it at night.

Why. Probably because the career people knock off at 5 and the cost of overtime for night crews. If that was the case, they could have called on volunteers.

The primary cause of the Yarloop disaster was again, the lack of night crews keeping a watch on the edge of the fire. Why?. DPaW and FESA personnel need to knock off at 5pm. OK. Call in the volunteer fire brigades. The career fire fighters only normally work during the day. The volunteers know fires don't go to sleep and so are prepared to fight night and day.

So a combination of public service mentality and a snooty nose attitude to the volunteer brigades, I believe, were major contributors to the two major fire disasters in the region in the last few years.

To prove this, questions must be asked as to what resources were put on the fire ground on the afternoon and evening prior to the Yarloop firestorm and, if they lacked the resources, why volunteers were not utilised.

My second observation stems from my actually going onto the fire ground the next day as part of a contingent from Wallcliffe Bush Fire Brigade and many other brigades from throughout the South West.

Apart from joining all the other participants in being very frustrated at not being utilised at all in the morning (20 or more trucks patrolling Cookernup was utter overkill). We and many of the other trucks just went out to where there was smoke and started protecting assets without any instructions from Central Control.

What really got me incensed was that Central Command had no clue as to what trucks were where. All the time there were calls as to where is such and such truck. Or a truck would call in say they were dealing with an issue and the question was asked, where are you. The answer would be somewhere down a street.

There was an incident where a light tanker went to investigate the fire in the pine plantation N of Forestry Rd relatively close to Forest Hwy. The fire came behind them so they carried on the track into the plantation hoping it would come out the other side. Instead it was a loop and they had to drive back through the fire to get out of the plantation. Fortunately, they got out ok, but had they had a problem with the vehicle, to get help they would have had to give out their coordinates from their GPS. That is not as simple and easy as it sounds and takes time. Had a tracking system been in place, that would have

not been necessary. Central command would have had the coordinates, seen what other vehicles were near and been able to send other crews or a helitac to assist.

Obviously, there was no vehicle tracking system in operation. There were probably more than 40 vehicles working around Cookernup that afternoon. At least \$2,000,000 worth of assets, let alone the "value" of the crews, and nobody knew where they were. And yet every one of those vehicles had a GPS system, an antennae on the roof, and a WAERN radio that on each use of the radio (when the talk button is pressed), included the GPS coordinates in that signal. The infrastructure has been there for years for a tracking system, but bloody minded FESA management has not been able to get off their arses and get a system operating. WTF not!.

Now over 5 years ago, members of the Wallcliffe Bush Fire Brigade developed their own vehicle tracking system. They wrote their own software and it has been implemented at our station on all our vehicles for 5 years. Any vehicle, when a crew member presses the button to make a call on the two way radio, has its location instantly updated on a computer screen, overlain on the latest aerial photograph and map of the region. There is a red box on the screen with the identification of the vehicle inside that box eg. Wallcliffe LT4 for Light Tanker 4.

Any member in the station can instantly see where the assets are, and with feedback on the fire behaviour, can make decisions as to where best to deploy the team, notify vehicles if there is a wind change and that they could be in danger, or if a vehicle is in trouble, instantly notify other vehicles nearby of their location. The system is also portable and can be used on a laptop or tablet anywhere as long as there is mobile internet available.

Twice, members of Wallcliffe station demonstrated the system to FESA but they weren't interested. They were going to do their own system.

After 5 years, they still do not have a system. Yet the free and very effective system from Wallcliffe could have been implemented state wide, as all the fire vehicles already have the GPS and radio system in place. It is part of WAERN. All it needed for any station was implementing the software and having loading up the maps, which every shire has at anyrate.

I regard management of FESA criminally responsible for the severity of the Yarloop fire because they had not instituted a simple vehicle tracking system (whether the system from Wallcliffe or their own) so they could better deploy vehicles and have better intelligence of the fire location and behaviour.

Combined with a culture of knocking off after 5pm and a culture of regarding the volunteer brigades as lesser beings, FESA and DPaW management are culpably responsible for the severity of the damage caused during the Waroona fire.

Yours truly,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]



## **Waroona Bushfire Special Enquiry - Submission**

I observed the fire from my place of residence the morning after the fire started and noted some smoke on the horizon. By that afternoon there was voluminous amount of smoke and it was obvious that the fire was out of control.

Thus my comments are predicated on my observations and are limited to the Terms of Reference 1(b) & 1(c).

I was not involved in anything other than as an observer and thus are not qualified to offer any comments on the other Terms of Reference.

### **Comment {1(b) & (c)}**

It is my belief that if the fire was hit by major air assets such as the sky Crane helicopter and the C130 aircraft when the fire was first noted then it may not have caused the damage it eventually did.

A graduated response does not work in fires located in inaccessible areas of forest and a major rethink of this strategy is required.

As such the Incident controller should have immediate access to such air assets mentioned above rather than having to wait for the incident to reach level 3.

It is my belief that the cost deploying of such assets are the reason why such assets are not released earlier and more frequently and as such we now have a \$26 million bill just to fix Western Power infrastructure.

What is required is a rethink of how fires are combated in forest areas.

A lot of forest areas have towns dotted throughout and along the edges mainly due to historical reasons and as such are vulnerable to bush fire attack (Dwellingup in the 60s)

As such I contend the following SOP should be adopted

1. Areas of forest adjacent or surrounding towns should be identified (eg Lane Pool reserve etc)
2. Should a fire break out in these areas (as identified) immediate deployment of major air assets to combat the fire (C130 & skycrane) should happen (if these assets are not required then the pilots could use the deployment as a training exercise). This maybe a waste of resources but the cost of fighting the fires in the Waroona area and the Lower Hotham area last year in loss of assets, volunteer time, stress caused to residents etc more than outweighs the cost of such deployment of these major air assets. The small helicopters and dromedary water bombers can not carry sufficient volume of water.

3. There may be some reluctance to deploy the major air assets due to not being able to see the fire due to smoke. Use of infra red cameras should more than adequately overcome this problem. Also, an aerial Incident Controller could control these aircraft (similar to control of ground forces by their commanding officer as seen in Vietnam War movies). This aerial Incident Controller could also be in contact with ground units.
4. Such major air assets should be based in the South west (either Bunbury or Albany) as well as Perth. This way the turn around time from base to the fire ground is dramatically reduced because they are based close to the problem areas.

In essence deployment of major air assets should happen as soon as a fire is observed in a forested area.



5<sup>th</sup> February, 2016

Mr E Ferguson

Waroona/Yarloop Fire Inquiry

Observations.

Dear Sir,

I am an individual not aligned with any fire service although throughout my career I have gained a great deal of experience both in Western Australia and other States of Australia. Amongst other qualifications I achieved certification (RMIT) in the middle 60's. Having been offered a position with the CFA as a Regional Officer (Region 24) should add authority to this submission.

The Start of the fire.

It is my understanding that the lightning strike which is credited with starting the fire occurred close to 0730H on the TUESDAY in Lane Pool reserve. The location is within the confines under the management of The Department of Parks and Wildlife (formerly CALM). The Department of Parks and Wildlife assert that they reported a fire in Lane Pool reserve at 0725h Wednesday. Should these comments be correct, the fire gained a 24 hour start before any action was taken by the approved authority. Given that the atmospheric conditions included hot North/Easterly winds (30 – 50 KPH) and the area had not been fire load reduced for many years this delay proved very costly.

The Wednesday Night saw the advent of a series of Thunder storms delivering “dry lightning to the area in the down-wind region of the initial fire, thus the spread of fire over-ran all resources directed at containment. The Department of Parks and Wildlife are on record as claiming they were NOT A FIRE FIGHTING RESOURCE. Yet they were ceded management of the fire. I include this notation to amplify the political background to the fire-fighting resources in the early stages.

Resources utilised by The Department of Parks and Wildlife.

I had cause to attend both Waroona and Dwellingup to provide transport support to The Department of Parks and Wildlife over much of the duration of the active phase of the fire. Due to my background I took a keen interest and offered assistance beyond my charter when needed. This assistance was mainly to aid the Logistics segment of the Department of Parks and Wildlife management. Initially I witnessed complete disarray by the people tasked to perform this task. That is not to say the individuals did not apply themselves diligently, but they seemed out of their depth.

In Waroona there were rows of “Dongas” with signs on the doors indicating the role conducted within each. This “closeted” effect of various support services meant that people had to leave their donga to seek information from other dongas in order to perform their task. The most prominent

remark I heard was “no-body knows”. Accordingly there was a high level of confusion in determining what needed to be done and when it needed to be done. There was no information available, or demonstrated, to indicate, when crews would be needing relief nor when replacement crews would be needed to replace the retiring crew. These organisers were paid members of the Parks and Wildlife Department.

I assisted this group of people by providing approx. journey times between various points where fire-fighters would be resting and the despatch points. To further assist the liaison between transport providers I also offered time spans from notification of a need for a vehicle and the approx. time delay to arrival at the desired location together with the most effective phone numbers to use to greatest effect. My first shift extended for 14 hours. Upon my return the following day I was dismayed to learn that the previously provided information had been lost. *It is my belief that being closeted, the relaying of information was hampered. Had I been tasked to provide the logistical transport service I most certainly would have insisted on a “situation Room” configuration. This was in play with the fire management participants. There were adequate facilities available at the location.*

Equipment stood idle for many hours. In this regard I am discussing fire-fighting appliances both “heavy” and “light”. At times I witnessed dozens of vehicles laid up on the Waroona oval whilst the crews took much needed rest and relief. The process of (initially) restricting crews to a nominated vehicle and the vehicle restricted to that crew robbed the fight of appliance hours on the fire-ground, especially in the early stages of the battle.

At this point I must applaud the support provided by the ambulance and the catering parties. In this theatre I doubt anything could have been done better.

The Department of Parks and Wildlife had a Satellite unit contained in a van on location. The unit clearly doesn't get much exercise as witnessed by extensive spider-weds inside the unit. The personnel within this unit seemed to not talk with each other and this desk didn't co-ordinate with the next desk. I found this to be very curious. The map plotting appeared to be well run but the weather forecasts adopted a “RAMSAR” methodology. I have never heard of this method outside the plotting of bird flight paths.

I continued to attend, daily at both Waroona and Dwellingup. Dwellingup is a township near to the ignition point of the fire and has a depot for Parks and Wildlife equipment. I noted that the staff at both Dwellingup and Waroona relied on mobile phones (seemingly their own phones) and the contact phone number for contact at each location constantly changed dependent upon who was on duty at either location. Naturally this caused its own set of issues. I know of a number of Fire-spotting towers in the Dwellingup area but did not inquire if they had been manned during the extreme fire-danger period preceding the fire. It was not my place to do so.

Once the fire was declared a Natural Emergency the management of the fire was delivered to the professional team from FESA. Not much altered in the area I was involved with, confusion still reigned and transport vehicles were present “on stand-by”. The Fire Appliances seemed to be betted utilised with vehicles being serviced and returned to the fire ground with fresh crews.

Sir, if I may I would make the following suggestions:

1. That all fire-fighting resources be vested under the FESA control at times of outbreaks. This would permit all organisations involved to have similar training and equipment.
2. That Rural Bush Fire Brigades be recognised as a fire fighting resource and equipped accordingly.
3. That personnel involved in logistical support be properly trained to know their function.
4. That communications at support centres DO NOT VARY PHONE NUMBERS for the duration of an event.
5. That co-ordination of resources be delivered via a “situation room” model and not outsourced into private cubicles as applied in this fire event.

Critical areas exposed.

1. The failure of this fire to be reported/attended to in the initial stages.
2. The failure to adequately provide effective support via the logistical model.
3. The excellent work done to provide meals (great quality) and refreshments.
4. The failure to react to the conditions in a meaningful manner prior to the Wednesday afternoon. Weather reports clearly indicated the extent of the weather turbulence anticipated.
5. Report cards; Parks and Wildlife F-, Bush fire brigades A+, FESA Fire Fighting units A SES and Catering A+ Waroona Council A+, Police support A, Traffic Management (private) B.

I hope this submission assists.

Sincerely yours, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 17 February 2016 2:39 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Waroona/Yarloop Fire Submission

**Categories:** Blue Category

To whom it may concern.

WAROONA.

Having been impacted by the recent fire which threatened Waroona on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016, I would like to relate to the inquiry our experience prior to evacuating our property.

We live at [REDACTED]

We had been aware all day that there was a fire to the east as we could see considerable smoke, however it was not close.

As recommended, we were watchful of the smoke throughout the day and constantly checked the DFES site for Warnings and Updates. Throughout the day the warning was the same. The fire was in Lane Poole, and that there was a **smoke alert EXCLUDING THE WAROONA TOWNSITE.**

We were aware of the smoke but did not feel that we were in any danger as the warning only referred to smoke and was so specific about excluding the townsite. We did not feel that any action was required.

Throughout the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> I continued to check the DFES site every 30 minutes or so and the message was the same – **a smoke alert excluding the Waroona townsite.** At 10pm we were about to go to bed and even though the warning was still the same, we were aware of smoke in the house so decided to check outside to see if we could see anything. We were astonished to find that there was a huge red glow and that the fire was in the paddock across the road. We went to the verge to check the street. There were at least 3 fire trucks in the street! No sirens had sounded on the fire trucks, no one spoke to us from the trucks as they drove past and the DFES warning was still saying only a smoke alert was in place.

Our neighbour drove by and seeing us on the verge advised that she had heard there was an evacuation centre in Pinjarra. We immediately collected our dog and laptop and left the house. It was obvious that we were in imminent danger however no warnings had been provided and the fire was literally across the street.

We went to the Town Hall but there was no one there. We stopped at the Visitors Centre carpark to assess the situation. At 10.10 we received a message saying the alert had been upgraded to a Watch and Act. We were also listening to the radio which also advised to Watch and Act. We decided to drive to Pinjarra as it was obvious that the situation was escalating and because we had been taken so much by surprise we felt we couldn't go home. At 10.15 while we were already driving to Pinjarra we received another text message saying to Leave Immediately.

My point in recounting this is that should there had been more relevant information on the DFES site we would have been more vigilant and would have taken entirely different actions. We trusted that the DFES warning was only about smoke and NOT RELEVANT TO THE WAROONA TOWNSITE. We would have been more watchful if we knew the fire was travelling towards the town but believed there was nothing in the area but smoke.

We found ourselves in the carpark of the Pinjarra Evacuation centre with nothing but the clothes we were wearing because by the time we realised we were in danger, we did not feel that we knew how much time we had to do anything. As we could actually see the fire without having had any warning that it was imminent, either electronically or even with sirens from the trucks who were in the street, we didn't know what might happen at any moment and so could do nothing but flee!

Throughout the night we got no more information from the DFES site than to evacuate and really believed that our house had been lost and that we had not had enough warning to take anything with us and were possibly homeless.

## YARLOOP

I would also like to say that at the meeting at 2pm at the Pinjarra Evacuation centre, the Incident Controller made a specific point to say that the wind was expected to change at any time and that focus was now on Yarloop and that they had a significant number of firefighters with substantial experience fighting house and residential fires specifically in Yarloop to keep the town safe. As many people in Waroona and Yarloop were going to facebook for information, I recounted on the Facebook page "Waroona Fire" what I had heard the Incident Controller say regarding Yarloop. Several people posted that they could not find any information anywhere to say whether it was safer to leave Yarloop or in fact was it now safer to stay. The information on the radio was saying that evacuation for people in the area was in a Westerly direction— however that also appeared to be where the fire was as it had travelled through to Preston Beach and that the wind was changing sending the fire back to the southeast. I checked the DFES site for clarification and could not even find the name Yarloop in any warning. I made a note on the facebook page of this but again pointed out that the Incident Controller had said that Yarloop was the focus.

It is very troubling that the Incident Controlled said at the evacuation meeting at 2pm that Yarloop was the focus and yet it appears that within 45 minutes of this, the power and water failed in the town and was not reinstated before the town was burned to the ground some 6 hours later. If Yarloop was the focus, and had significant numbers of people in the town experienced in fighting residential fires, how is it that no one could arrange for water to be made available. I think that these things need to be examined to avoid a repeat of the mismanagement of this fire which have had such tragic consequences.



18th February 2016

50-60 years ago farmers and property owners were encouraged to burn off all road sides and smaller adjoining government properties.

All country fires were put out by the local volunteer bush fire brigades, forestry Department and with the assistance of local earth moving contractors, farmers and local shire.

I've seen this first hand and within the next hour or so these people become a very very well organized and powerful force. With all their local knowledge fires were brought under control in a very short time.

If powerlines were at risk the SEC would isolate all affected areas the forestry department would fall any problem trees and all this completed by the next day and people allowed back on their properties soon after.

The sooner we go back to this common sense way the better. It will save many properties, loss of lives, stress and tens of millions of dollars.

[REDACTED]

Ph: [REDACTED]

Would like to discuss the above in further detail privately.

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
West Perth  
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[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

21<sup>st</sup> February, 2016

By [REDACTED], Life Member, Kalamunda Volunteer Bushfire Brigade

I have been an active member of the Kalamunda Volunteer Bushfire Brigade since 1990. During the past 25 years I have attended over 600 emergency incidents, and have been involved in approximately 1000 hazard reduction burns. I have been a member of incident management teams at numerous incidents. I have been involved in the management of my Brigade for at least 15 of the past 25 years, including serving as Captain, Fire Control Officer and Training Officer. I have been a volunteer trainer and assessor for DFES and was a trainer on two career firefighter schools in the early noughties. I was employed by the Shire of Kalamunda between 1997 and 2003 as a Fire Protection Officer, and I currently work as a Bushfire Consultant. I believe I am qualified to speak knowledgably about bushfires in Western Australia.

I make this submission as an individual, rather than as a representative of the Kalamunda Bushfire Brigade. The views expressed are my own. I do not wish it to be confidential, nor do I wish to orally present at the inquiry.

I make this submission to the inquiry because I am sick of the dysfunctional relationship between and within the various fire services in Western Australia, and the impact that this dysfunction inevitably has on the efficiency of firefighting efforts. The various fire services in Western Australia are rife with political infighting, and various parties within those services have specific agendas that seemingly have nothing to do with improving community safety. The problems are ones of culture: both the major players, DFES and DPAW, have long running, insular conservative cultures, that work for them when they are on their own, but which are contrary to good management of large bushfire incidents when they have to work with other organisations.

### *Culture, Politics, and Individual Agendas in the Western Australian Fire Services*

This section is largely written in response to sections 2 and 3 of the terms of reference of this inquiry. I start with this because I believe that it is crucial to understand how the various fire services are organised, their respective cultures, and the way they deal with each other. The Keelty Report talked extensively about the need for cultural change, but I have seen little of this occurring. If anything cultural division has gotten worse.

To understand DFES it is necessary to understand that DFES management is essentially the Fire and Rescue Service management. The vast majority of senior managers in DEFS derive from that organisation. When FESA was set-up, the majority of the hierarchy of the new organisation came from the FRS, and this has not changed. As a result DFES has an FRS-centric approach, with FRS officers retaining their allegiance to their original organisation, with a detrimental result for the greater DFES organisation. They don't see themselves as DFES staff – they see themselves as FRS staff, working for DFES. The FRS culture is one that prioritises structural firefighting over any other type of fire, that favours incident response rather than hazard reduction, and which focuses on the Perth metropolitan area rather than the entire state. The FRS is also heavily unionised, so there is significant overlap with United Firefighters Union politics. Equally importantly, the FRS career staff see themselves as the only people with the validity to speak on issues of firefighting in Western Australia – they are the “Fire Brigade” – everyone else are just imposters. Consequently, DFES BFS and SES personnel are treated as second class citizens and there are far less resources relative to need put towards bushfires than towards the traditional FRS areas of structural firefighting and urban response. Many of the FRS personnel who end up in charge of major bushfires have limited bushfire experience, as they have spent their entire careers in the metropolitan area responding to relatively small local bushfire incidents, with limited opportunity to attend major fires. These officers have limited experience at combatting large scale broadacre or forest fires. Many of these officers, while excellent managers at large structural fire incidents, do not have the bushfire specific skills or experience to be part of IMTs at major level 2 and 3 bushfire incidents. FRS ground level response to bushfires is inflexible, as both pump and light tankers must be deployed together, resulting in the two wheel drive pumps sitting idly on the side of the road for 90% of the time. The fact that the FRS have continued employing 2 wheel drive vehicles when half their fires are bushfires, speaks volumes for their inability to change.

Additionally, DFES itself is a highly dysfunctional organisation, with major divisions within it, and animosity between staff that come from an FRS background, and everyone else. DFES has a culture of scapegoating and blame, and every time a major incident occurs, the first thing that happens is that DFES staff start trying to cover themselves and to find someone else to blame. The DFES response of blaming the volunteers who didn't get fed at the recent Myalup incident (described in the news as “Foodgate”) is a prime example of this. There is non-stop political manoeuvring within DFES, and none of it stops when a fire happens. This is exacerbated by the input of the United Firefighters Union (UFU) and the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (AVBFB), both of which have specific agendas and long standing grievances which colour the way they behave.

The UFU has significant power in its ability to impact on fire policy in Western Australia, and it has an agenda that is contrary to community safety in the broader sense. It generally sees volunteer firefighters as untrained, unprofessional, and a threat to the jobs of career firefighters. None of these things are true. Every time there is a major disaster the UFU uses it as leverage to advance their agenda and releases statements calling for more career firefighters and denigrating the skills and knowledge of volunteers. One of these statements was made in the wake of the Waroona Fire. It has also been reported that they have also made a number of proclamations during the past two fire seasons that career staff should not take orders from volunteer firefighters, and I have personally experienced career FRS firefighters refusing to take instruction from suitably qualified volunteer BFB sector commanders at fires. This has had the obvious result that volunteer sector commanders have been unable to deploy firefighting resources appropriately on their sectors, because some of those resources refuse to play ball. The AVBFB has a long standing grievance against both DFES and the UFU. It seeks to speak for bushfire volunteers in Western Australia, but the reality is that the vast majority of Bushfire Brigades and their volunteers, are not members of the

AVBFB, nor have any input into their operation. While the AVBFB officers are generally good people, they are not representative of bushfire brigades in WA in general.

In contrast, DPAW has a culture that sees itself as a forestry organisation, rather than as a firefighting operation. As such they see fire as a tool that is used to manage fuel loads in forest coups. While they have always fought forest fires, until fairly recently they would have been characterised as a forestry service with a hazard reduction branch, rather than a firefighting organisation. They have never considered themselves an “Emergency Service” despite being recently remoulded as one. Their culture is extremely insular and they struggle to work with other organisations, particularly DFES. Like DFES they are excellent at what they do, which is dealing with large scale forest fires, remote from property and towns. The problem comes when the fire impacts on these places, as the DPAW personnel have limited training or experience in the management of fires in rural / urban interface areas, or the large scale protection of property.

I acknowledge that the management of large level 2 and 3 incidents is difficult, and that managers often have limited options to combat fires, other than to protect property and wait for a weather change. However I have been at numerous major fires which have been run poorly, primarily because the major agencies are unable to work effectively with each other, and where the outcome of the firefighting effort has suffered as a result. Yet when you read the results of internal DFES critical incident reviews held after these incidents, you would think everything had run perfectly. The Keely report is the only time that any enquiry has ever got close to making a true statement about the dysfunction; this report had a positive impact for a while, but many of the old divisions are resurfacing. To put it plainly, the two major organisations tasked with firefighting operations in Western Australia, DFES and DPAW, have an extremely poor working relationship. I have been at numerous fires where the cultural differences between the two groups, and their inability to communicate with each other, have had adverse impacts on the firefighting effort. This poor relationship has been impacting on efforts to combat major fires for a long time. For example, as long ago as January 2005, attempts to combat the Perth Hills Fire, which burnt 27,000 hectares over two weeks, were severely hampered by divisions between what were then the DEC and FESA. During that fire the DEC had their control point set up out near Barton’s Mill, while FESA had theirs set up over 10km away at the Pickering Brook Sports Club. I remember the frustration of FESA staff at their inability to get any information from DEC personnel during the fire. They resorted to physically sending the Kalamunda Chief Bushfire Control Officer Peter Sewell, and KVFBF volunteers, out to the DEC control point to try and gather information. For a couple of days during that fire, this was the only way FESA staff were able to gain information from DEC about the fire effort. This almost had tragic consequences. On the Monday afternoon, most of the FESA and BFB resources were deployed to Karragullen, when the fire got out of control on DEC controlled sectors and made a run on Pickering Brook, 20km away. This information was not communicated to FESA staff, until 000 calls started coming in from panicked Pickering Brook residents. There were virtually no firefighting appliances in Pickering Brook when the fire hit the Merrivale Road area, and the only reason there were no property losses was because volunteers had worked extremely hard for two days assisting residents to prepare their properties before the fire got there. To my knowledge this occurrence never made it into the critical incident review held after the fire. The poor working relationship between these two agencies has not improved significantly in the 11 years since this fire.

The problem is that everyone in the WA career fire services hates everyone else, and everyone knows it; every single person knows it is happening, and yet nothing changes. And the volunteers, and more importantly, the community, are stuck in the middle of all this. There are some very good

people in the various services, but they are constrained within cultures that limit their ability to be effective.

### *The Waroona Fire*

I was deployed to the Waroona Fire as a crew member on a KVFBF appliance on two occasions: first on the 8<sup>th</sup> January as part of a strike team, in the afternoon and evening; and second on the 15<sup>th</sup> January for the day shift. I have six specific comments to make in relation to these two shifts and this fire in general.

My first comment is in response to section 1(d) in the terms of reference. There was a clear lack of cohesion between DFES, DPAW and volunteer BFBs at this fire. When we arrived at the control point in Waroona on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> we searched around to find where to book in and lodge our t-cards. We visited the central area where the ICV was located and spoke to the Operations Officer, a DPAW officer (who I know well) and a number of other people. We asked where we should book in and no one was able to tell us. In this area all we could find were DPaW people, and numerous staff from NSW who were doing management roles. None of these people were able to tell us where to book in. Eventually someone said something along the lines of “I think the DFES people are over in the fire station”, meaning the Waroona FRS Station. We went over there and sure enough, that’s where DFES and BFB appliances were getting booked in.

What struck me about this was that no-one in the central command area knew where the DFES people were set up, 9 days into the fire. The Ops Officer didn’t know. The central area had a huge whiteboard with about 40 DPaW appliances listed on it, but not one DFES or BFB appliance was on it. Instead, these were recorded in an old fashioned battle board in the fire station. The distance between the central Ops area, and the fire station, is approximately 130m as the crow flies. It is as if some form of apartheid was in operation, with the DPaW people using one set of facilities and the DFES people another. I’m not entirely sure how they were communicating with each other.

As we prepared to head out to the fire ground we were approached by the acting AVBFB President Dave Gossage – he had an operational role but I can’t remember what it was. He shook our hands, gave us his business card, and told us to call him direct if we had any trouble. He said that the UFU had made “a proclamation that career firefighters should not take orders from volunteers, and that if we had any issues of that sort we should let him know”.

This little snapshot tells you everything you need to know about the way the various fire services in WA deal with each other. And as I write this I realise that, as we were experiencing all this we didn’t bat an eyelid. Because this is what happens at almost all the fires. It is a situation that has become normalised and we would be surprised if we encountered anything else. We have well developed coping mechanisms designed to deal with the chaos. We take our own food and drinking water as we expect to often not get fed, we know we will have to chase people around at control points in order to get deployed, and we rarely get a briefing. We have developed a range of resources in our appliances that allow us to track the welfare of our own crews, because we have no faith it will happen otherwise. As volunteers, when a major fire runs well and everyone from the various agencies gets on well together, we remark on it, because it is remarkable. It doesn’t happen often. This suggests to me that any reforms, as outlined in section 2(b) of the terms of reference, have been ineffective, as we have seen no marked change at these major incidents.

My second comment is in response to sections 1(b) and 1(c) of the terms of reference, and relates to the excessive lengths of the shifts that volunteers and some career staff were asked to do. We were

routinely deployed to do 12 hour shifts, with a 90 minute drive to and from home on either end of that. These were regardless if it was a night shift or not. Many members of my Brigade did overnight 12-14 hour shifts after completing a full days' work. Strike teams would deploy for 12 hours and then volunteers would be asked to drive home, from Waroona to Perth, at the end of those shifts. There was clearly no consideration of fatigue management in the organisation of this fire. This fire season I have routinely seen DFES operational staff doing 15 – 18 hour shifts at fires. My understanding is that DPAW staff still do 24 hour shifts. The effects of fatigue are well known and decision making becomes difficult after a certain amount of time without rest, but I see no evidence that this is a concern in the management of these fires. It was lucky no one was injured as a result of fatigue, but I do wonder what effect fatigue had on decision making at a management level at these major fires.

My third point relates to section 1(d) of the terms of reference, and the poor logistical response, particularly related to welfare (ie feeding and watering of fire crews) at the fire. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, during a 12 hour shift, we received a hot pie in the afternoon, and a plate of wedges in the evening. We eventually received a proper meal at about 2200 hours, after we had been on the fire ground for 10 hours. This is not enough food to fight fires over a 12 hour shift. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, again while doing a 12 hour shift, we were told that lunch would run from 1200 hours to 1430 hours, and if we weren't able to get to the control point within that space of time, we would miss out. This isn't good enough. Sometimes you can't get off the fireground at a set time, particularly if you are engaged in property protection. This mirrors problems with food and welfare that have occurred at fires throughout this fire season. Over the past seven or eight years the Salvation Army have been responsible for welfare at all major fires, with high quality results. Ample amounts of food have been available at control points throughout the duration of major incidents. This year DFES decided to stop using the Salvation Army as their primary welfare option, and seemingly went into this season without a welfare option in place. This left them scrambling with local providers to try and deal with welfare requirements for hundreds of people. The mismanagement of the welfare at major fires this season, is indicative of poor management decisions being made across the board. An army marches on its stomach, and this year the welfare of that army has been compromised at numerous fires. The lack of a clear plan that could be implemented has had an obvious detrimental effect.

My fourth comment is in response to section 1(a) of the terms of reference, and relates to the excessive fuel load we encountered in forests while battling the fire near Lake Clifton on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. The fuel load on each side of the Old Coast Road was extreme and there was no indication that hazard reduction had been applied in those areas for many years. Prevention is always better than a cure, and hazard reduction must be part of any discussion about bushfire policy in the south-west of Western Australia. In my opinion there should be no bush block on crown land, whether National Park, State Forest, Water Catchment, or UCL, that is not included in regular hazard reduction programs, which should aim to maintain ALL bush in Western Australia at a fuel load of less than 10 T/ha. There would be no major bushfire disasters if this goal was achieved. Yet DFES shut down its hazard management section a couple of years ago, and sacked all its hazard reduction employees. DPAW primarily deals with State Forest and National Parks, but this leaves vast swathes of unmanaged unallocated crown lands which need to be dealt with. The DFES hazard management section was doing this, through a proactive process of prescribed burning, but its closure effectively meant there was no agency responsible for hazard reduction on UCL.

My fifth comment is in response to section 1(e) of the terms of reference. Numerous power poles were burnt out at the fire including many new ones. We witnessed numerous poles that had been treated with fire retardant at the base, but not the whole pole. The parts of the pole treated with the retardant were generally unburnt, while the rest of the pole above them was destroyed. I would

expect that the cost of retardant for the whole pole is less than replacing the entire pole, and would suggest that all new poles should be completely covered with this fire retardant, which proved to be very effective.

My final comment relates to the lack of a section specific to climate change in the terms of reference for the review of this fire. Over the past 25 years we have seen a clear increase in the intensity of fire events, and a much higher number of days where the FDI is Very High or above. The fire season is now nearly two months longer than it used to be. Climate change has a clear impact in that we get a far greater number of major fires now than in previous decades. While I don't want to excuse the dysfunction in the management of these large fires, it is clear that climate is having an impact and making them harder to fight and extinguish. It is my considered opinion that any future planning for major fires in Western Australia must acknowledge climate change, and that maybe, incident management policies that were applicable in the past, need to be reconsidered for the future under these new and changing weather regimes. This fire created its own weather, in a way I have never seen before, and that impacted drastically on the ability to combat it. At one stage on the 8<sup>th</sup> we had wind, and consequently fire, coming from both directions, the east and the west, making it extremely hard to predict what the fire was likely to do next. Fire is a physical process and it is largely predictable as a result – but it is also weather driven, and if the weather is changing then that must be considered. Current research (by Chaney and colleagues) suggests that fire models underestimate rate of spread, and that fires burn three or four times more intensely than suggested by the modelling. Funding for scientific research into bushfires should be increased to allow us to understand what is likely to happen in the future. Likewise, in the wake of climate change, hazard reduction must be prioritised as the primary way of maintaining community safety in Western Australia.

### *The Way Forward*

This final section again returns to section 3 of the terms of reference, in suggesting some appropriate changes for the future. The dysfunction in Western Australian fire services has been going on for far too long and as a result, most of the major players have agendas which are often contrary to community safety. The current management (by that I mean everyone from Station Officer level and up within DFES, and the equivalent officers in DPAW) have proven themselves incapable of altering this reality and it is time to try a new approach. The fact that we have the confusing patchwork of DPAW, DFES (comprising the FRS, BFS, SES etc) and local governments, all of whom have input into fire response dependent upon land tenure, and a range of different and often conflicting legislation supporting them, leads to a mish-mash of policy and the possibility of division. We need one organisation that deals with bushfires, similar to a CFA. In my opinion neither DPAW nor DFES is an appropriate organisation to base that response on. Local government should also be removed from a bushfire response role as well, as this leads to too much variation in approach for bushfire brigades across the state.

Any new bushfire organisation should be based on the reality that volunteers make up the vast majority of bushfire response in Western Australia. It also needs to recognise that many of the problems in Western Australia are cultural, and that these need to be addressed from the start. Simply rebranding one of the existing organisations will not cut it. This new organisation should take responsibility for fire response in all areas not gazetted as an FRS fire district. The FRS should continue doing what they are best at – fire response in a suburban setting, with a focus on structural firefighting. It should be recognised that DPAW has never really been an emergency response

organisation and it should be reduced to a hazard mitigation role only, with their fire response capacity folded into the new organisation. The DFES hierarchy is largely made up of FRS officers, many with limited bushfire knowledge, and so that hierarchy should not be the basis of any new organisation either. In my opinion the Bush Fire Service should be split off from DFES and used to form the nucleus of this new organisation, bolstered by various local government officers and suitably qualified people from the volunteer ranks and DPAW. It should be suitably resourced and we need much greater on the ground resourcing for bushfire response (this does not mean more helicopters. These are useful, and the current level of coverage should be maintained. But helicopters are expensive, of limited use during large fires, can't fly at night and can't fly in high winds. Helicopters were of no help when the fire struck Yarloop). We need many more fire appliances located in regional areas. This new emergency organisation should be based on the CFA model and have primary responsibility for all bushfires in the state that occur outside the gazetted fire district. They should be immediately responsible for the management of all level 2 and 3 fires in the state, regardless of where they occur. Until we have one suitably qualified and resourced organisation responsible for bushfires, the dysfunctional response to major incidents will continue, with tragic results for the community.

We also need more scientific investigation of fires and climate change, and more resources put towards hazard reduction. The best way to keep the community safe is to maintain fuel loads at manageable levels, particularly close to urban areas and property.

Thanks for your time.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



21-02-2016

Submission to Waroona Bushfire Enquiry

Attention: Euan Ferguson [waroonainquiry@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:waroonainquiry@semc.wa.gov.au)

I am very sorry about the death of two towns folk and the loss to the town of Yarloop, it is the magnitude of the loss which has prompted me to make my very first submission to any enquiry.

If I had anything thing to do with the control of the fire, Yarloop would be still standing, no evacuations would have been necessary and the two major roads, the life blood of the south west, would not have been closed for extended periods and the whole state would be millions of dollars better off.

I will detail what I would have done differently. Firstly the fire did not start on Wednesday as stated by DFES, the storm that started the fire in Lane Pool Reserve was Tuesday afternoon and into the evening, so at 7.00am Wednesday morning I would have had a spotter plane in the air to find the fires. No doubt there would have been more than one ignition point as there were hundreds of lightning strikes hitting that forest. The spotter plane would have alerted the water bombers which could have kept the fire cold until a path was cleared to the area and ground crews could get in to blacken out all the perimeter/s. The spotter plane would be necessary also in guiding ground crews and monitoring the progress of all the fires. At this very stage, even given the highly predictable fire danger I imagine the fires getting no bigger than a few hectares.

The following factors should have been monitored, and when circumstances line up like they did, the fire fighters and the whole community should be on and even on standby. Maybe it will become the job of the Bushfire Risk Management Coordinator to monitor the real fire danger. I will elaborate. When the soil moisture reaches zero in the top 100mm, when it hasn't rained for 4 months, when the bush hasn't been burned for more than 4 years, when the weather patterns turn so the wind is heating up from many thousand Kilometres over land, when the temperature reaches more that 36C for a period of days and when the humidity drops to where it was that day, then you have a totally predictable fire scenario. And all hands should be on alert before the fire even starts. In these circumstances, you don't start to organise the attack after the fire has escalated or escaped. You may have noticed that fires are bigger now that they are managed by paid incident controllers. Whereas a generation ago there were more people on the ground at the early stages and fires were stopped quicker when they were smaller.

I will now elaborate on what should have happened in the months before the fire, if Cold Burning (done during dry spells in Winter) was done around Lane Pool Reserve, and by that I mean Volunteer Bush Fire brigade members are given the instruction to light up the edge of a forest and let it creep inwards until it goes out with the cold or wet, then the cold burnt edge would have been a reasonable fire break to stop fires entering the reserve, but more importantly, a perfect fire break to back burn form and stop the fire from escaping its original area.

I've lost count of the times I have heard "Jumped Containment Lines". Clearly the containment lines are inadequate. Back Burning must be used as a tool and a blanket ban on back burning is a ridiculous scenario and a sign that back burns have been poorly planned and the blame game has affected logic. Firstly, back burns need very good fire breaks, (2) they need to be done at night when it's less dangerous, (3) they need to be done against land which has decent access to manoeuvre to extinguish hop overs. (4) Plans to back burn Back Burn should be set up in winter so we have decent blocks protected by breaks and cold burns so that if a fire does start in a certain forest, as we should expect it to, then we light up around the edge of that block at night and lock the fire in.

Things that should always happen.

- Locals with local experience should be working side by side with decision makers. Distinction between paid emergency workers and local volunteers should not become a barrier.
- Local Contractors should be used to install breaks and combat and clean up afterwards.
- Locals should be able to travel through Roads Blocks, so next time DEFES block a road, they simply need to take down locals ID, a reason for going through, record names ect, and tick them off when they come back out. Only a property owner knows what he or she needs to do to save the house prior to a fire. Locking people out will immediately get people angry and that emotion is much better channelled into working together with authorities.
- Cold burns need to be happening every possible opportunity during winter. There are numerous problems associated, none more annoying than burning a road verge and having to extinguish every wooden fence post on a property boundary. So I see local brigades working with locals to spray fire breaks and to spray right through the fences so posts are included in the fire break and don't burn as easy.
- The barriers put up by green groups and government enviros should have no effect on combatting a fire. They can be worried about conditions on land developments and progress during routine times but a fire is an emergency and as our climate dries out, they may be better employed putting a fire uniform on and joining the fire fighters
- Sensible land clearing for the purpose of fire breaks should be encouraged and not be on the front page of the paper as authorities try to make an example out of someone for breaching land clearing policy.
- Every effort should be put into arresting fires during the night. The humidity is higher, temp and wind are most times lower, back burning is safer, and fires become more predictable.

Things that should never happen.

- No one should be threatened with fines or going to jail during the combatting of a fire. If a fire fighter sees an obvious solution to a problem, and he is right there, then he is in the best position to judge what to do. Threatening volunteers with liability or legal action if they vary from instructions is un-Australian, unfair, and must stop.
- Bulldozers should never be transported from Perth to Esperance to combat a fire if the same machines are available in Esperance. Once again include Local Knowledge.
- Bulldozers should never be stood down at a fire because they need washing before going into the fire ground. Really, who are we kidding?
- Whole towns, Phone towers, power transmission lines, all government infrastructure including utilities need adequate fire breaks and should never be at risk of burning. Even if large areas of trees need to be removed.

I hope my input helps prevent future fires from escalating into fire storms, there is a tremendous amount of cold burning on edges and road verges to be done, not forgetting the hazard reduction burns that already happens in spring or autumn as well. The local bushfire brigades need to be getting requests to burn as many boundaries and road verges as possible when it's safe. There is a lot of catching up to do with fire breaks as we break away from the control of minority green people or groups and now see that we can't continue this way, especially as we go into a dryer climate.

Yours faithfully

██████████

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 3 May 2016 11:24 AM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** FW: Waroona post Incident Analysis  
**Attachments:** PIA - Waroona Jan 16 AMR Shire.doc

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 18 February 2016 5:46 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Waroona post Incident Analysis

To Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM  
Special Inquirer  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Dear Mr Ferguson

The Shire of Augusta Margaret River was involved in the response to the Waroona Fires from the early hours of January 7th 2016 until our final shift six days later. This Shire provided a total of 16 different appliances from 10 Bush Fire Brigades and 4 Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service Brigades as well as SES personal and vehicles. We provided over 4600 fire fighter hours from more than 200 volunteers, many doing multiple shifts.

At the end of every incident, the brigades that attended will usually hold a debrief. If the incident is large enough or complex enough, this Shire will hold a Post Incident Analysis which aims to capture any issues that may have occurred. These issues may be what worked well as well as what needs improvement. We try to make a recommendation based on this feedback which we hope will help us in the future to avoid the not so good and also to replicate and enhance the positives.

I have attached for your information a copy of the PIA that was held in response to the deployment to the Waroona Fires. It follows a template that we have been using for a number of years and we have found that it covers most areas of concern. In our report, unfortunately, we have had to be critical of the behaviour of a number of the volunteer fire fighters from the fire affected areas. This is something that I, as Chief, am not very comfortable with, but the incident that occurred needs to be raised as an issue as it impacted on the welfare of the fire fighters that I represent. Our fire fighters are aware that there was a sense of despair amongst the brigades from the affected region and are prepared to 'cut them some slack'.

If you think that there would be benefit from a face to face meeting or a telephone conversation to discuss any of the above, I am very happy to oblige with any help that I can offer.

Regards

[REDACTED]

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**INCIDENT NAME: Waroona Inc no 323128 AMR Shire Report**

**DATE: 7-12 Jan 2016**

**NOTIFICATION & TURN OUT**

**Positives:**

- Pre arrangements worked well as we knew who to go straight to at 2am.
- Advice and turnout worked well and ran smoothly.

**Negatives:**

- 2am is very early!
- This first shift was very long due to the early start.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Make sure first shift is fully crewed to allow for crew rest breaks.  
Don't go undermanned.
- Take dual cabs rather than single cabs where possible to assist with enough crew to allow for rest breaks.

**TASK ALLOCATION**

**Positives:**

- First shift unable to get to control point due to downed power lines and bridge out but task force leaders took control and made plans rather than causing long delays for crews.

**Negatives:**

- Friday morning shift was very slow to be tasked from the control point.
- Tasks need to be clearly communicated to crews so if they are parked up without a lot to do they understand that there may well be a reason for this in the bigger picture.
- Unable to find SC on the Saturday day shift.
- Slow deployment from Ops point on Saturday morning – 1 hr
- It appeared that crews were triaging for RUI and handed in the info but then next day shift were tasked to do the same thing in the same location.
- SC was not utilising green rural street numbers but rather saying second house from such and such corner. Didn't seem to have awareness of RSNs.
- Some sectors were over resourced and re-tasking was slow.  
Crews felt under-utilized.
- Too many crews were on the fire ground by Sunday and it left them bored.
- Bush Fire Brigades should not have been tasked to the refinery infrastructure on the Thursday night shift, it should have been VFRS crews due to the nature of the structures.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- More structure needs to be in place for the arrival of incoming crews so they are already allocated a sector and can deploy more quickly.
- Ensure at the briefing that you take down the SC channel and mobile phone number along with the VLO contact to enable alternate communication if required.
- Keep our task forces together as a sector as this works really well when it happens, better tasking happens in this scenario.
- A better system of recording structural triages so that the info gets passed on to subsequent crews. Request that a standardised form and marking be developed by DFES.
- Recognise that crews don't want to go away to sit around and not do anything.

## **COMMAND ON SECTOR**

### **Positives:**

- First shift had SC/TFL that knew our crews and their capabilities and stayed with them and that worked really well.
- Crews stuck to task even when they felt ineffective.
- SC's took a strong lead in making the plans for their sector in many cases.
- Many SC's were clear and concise in their instructions and this gave crews confidence in their abilities.

### **Negatives:**

- Span of control was too large in some cases.
- Saturday morning SC did not seem to have a control of what was happening on sector and had exercised some poor decision making.  
This sector lost control of the fire.  
A crew arriving late on this sector did not get an adequate brief.
- Lack of information coming down the chain of command led to a lack of situational awareness for crews on sectors.
- Identification for SC vehicles as all DFES vehicles look the same and can cause confusion.
- Some local SC's had strong ties to the community and whilst they had good local knowledge they were not able to be as objective when the situation required it.
- SC's seemed to be lacking skills on a number of shifts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Continue to send a task force with a local crew leader and continue to try and keep the task force together on one sector.
- Better vetting of who takes the role of SC. Insist that they are trained and capable. Do not say 'you are an FCO so you must be able to do SC' or 'you are in a LT so that will work as SC'
- Recommend that all SCs have a person appointed to assist them in the role of radio operator/answer phone/navigate/diarise/track sector vehicles etc. Recommend it is someone that is 'in training' to be a SC.

- SC and crew shift change should not occur concurrently. SC should change mid way of crew shift. (Unless it is a SC with a TF and they are staying together, not important in this case)
- More information needs to be fed to firefighters down the chain of command. Better briefings.
- Suggest magnetic SC signs that can have the sector name written on as well.

## **RADIO COMMS**

### **Positives:**

- When unable to get comms for the whole sector, the sector kept trying to get something that would work for them as a group of vehicles. Unable to get any comms back to ops so did it via mobile phone via Commcen to advise of lost comms and our current location.
- UHF mid band worked well as an alternative to VHF high band simplex.

### **Negatives:**

- Unsure of what channel we were supposed to be on as the task force left Busselton. Crews needed assistance.
- Not all crews had UHF hand held radios.
- Black spots in certain areas.
- Multiple radio repeaters crashed at the same time.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- More radio training and practice.
- Bring in Digital Radio.
- More VHF simplex channels need to be made available for big incidents.

## **CREW SKILLS**

### **Positives:**

- Our AMR shire has a very high standard of crew skills and very competent operators.
- Everyone happy with their crew allocation (ie who they were working closely on the truck with).
- Good leadership from crew leaders.
- Crews found Nathan to be a capable CESM and SC.
- Pete Thomas also did an amazing job with our TF. Very respectful of volunteers.
- Flexibility and proactive work ethic amongst crews.
- Crews used LACES effectively throughout.
- Crews adapted well to changing and dangerous conditions.
- Crews understand they did their best and could not have done more to save specific assets.
- Crews stayed to their allocated tasks and displayed professionalism at all times.

**Negatives:**

- Finding radio channels was difficult for some.
- Some crews frustrated with a lack of information and seemingly underutilization and this displayed in their attitude.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- More radio training.
- Continued commitment to training.
- Discussions at brigade training to provide an awareness of what happens at larger incidents, a need to understand the bigger picture and how it relates to that feeling that you are not being utilised properly. Need to understand that even though a task seems unimportant it is often very relevant and important to the bigger picture. Understand that not everyone will get to chase the head fire. We all work as part of a team to achieve the outcome and some tasks are not as pretty as others.

**EQUIPMENT****Positives:**

- Scott Full Face Respirators were overwhelmingly well accepted by fire fighters. Many used them for long periods of time and gave very positive feedback.
- Private tractors and ploughs were doing a really good job on the fire ground in open grass paddocks.
- Brunswick community supported the crew who needed emergency repairs to their truck.

**Negatives:**

- Two monitors on an appliance would be helpful.
- No maps available in the vehicles for neighbouring regions.
- Issues with soil type and ground cover and large trucks getting bogged.
- All vehicles suffered mechanical issues due to constant 24 hour use.
- Lack of enough DFES mechanical tech's onsite.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Dedicated DFES mechanics needs to be readily available at all large incidents, one needs to be available at each division.  
Consider out sourcing if not available.
- Purchase a second monitor for vehicles.
- An ESD for neighbouring regions.
- Fire Ground maps.
- Bog mats for LT's and trucks.
- Brigades need to train by taking vehicles through varying terrain to see what gear and 4WD configuration works best for their vehicle.

## **OH & S**

### **Positives:**

- People using the new smoke masks really appreciated them.
- Having capable task force leaders on the first shift that could basically take control and run our group pretty much as a localised incident given we couldn't reach the control point. Crew were put to work while a contact was made with IC via the backroads by one of the two leaders.
- LACES adhered to very well.
- Most people were correctly wearing PPC.

### **Negatives:**

- Lack of maps.
- Lack of briefing on the first day as unable to get to the control point.
- Unknown risks at refinery. No refinery maps available showing location of high risk assets or potential risks to personnel, water points etc. Appeared they had no critical incident management plan.  
Lack of critical incident response from Alcoa staff. It appeared they did not have a structure to respond to an emergency of that size.  
Crews working after the first shift were in a hazardous environment without being provided with any local knowledge.
- Risk from Irrigation channels, no local knowledge.
- Lack of understanding from the IMT requesting irrigated paddocks to be fully tracked rather than burning out to establish edges to prevent the need for unnecessary damage to irrigated paddocks.
- Bus trip home through active fire ground was not acceptable.
- Travelling through an active fire ground to get to the control point is also unacceptable.
- Be aware of machine operators' ability on the fire ground. Not all are aware and capable when dealing with fire.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Shift changes should have briefing between SCs, preferable hot brief change over for SCs so they can be shown a sector.
- Ensure that contractors get clear instruction and leadership from a machine supervisor. All machines should operate with a vehicle escort.

## **INTERAGENCY INTERACTION**

### **Positives:**

- It was good once DFES were allowed into the management.
- Locally within our task force it was excellent, DFES AO, shire CESM, VBFB, VFRS and with local MR P&W staff that we met on the fire ground.
- The VLO role worked really well to support the volunteers.

**Negatives:**

- Very poor support from Alcoa refinery fire services.
- IAP's from P&W to other agencies were non-existent.
- Some local Harvey Waroona Shire Brigades started acting out of line with the incident management objectives and caused issues with our crews. They were tired, fatigued and some were very abusive and threatening to our crews.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- IAP's are a must for all crews in shifts once the IMT is established.
- Better management of local crews given the stress they were under.

**LOGISTICS AND WELFARE****Positives:**

- Brilliant support from the Brunswick community in setting up the welfare from and through the footy club. They were all very welcoming and appreciative of what we were doing and couldn't have been any more helpful.
- Alcoa female staff on request came to support us by opening up the canteen and making sandwiches when we were unable to obtain lunch through the Waroona control on the first shift.
- TFL/SC used initiative to source food on way to incident.
- Food on the bus was also very welcomed during the first bus trip for shift changeover.

**Negatives:**

- First shift were unable to get any food for 45 crew out at the refinery from the Waroona control. We started trying at 10am and by 2pm still could not get food.
- Smaller buses have limited room for gear bag storage.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- First crews need to be self-sufficient for welfare which is difficult when called at short notice or at 2am.
- Use larger buses so everyone can have their gear near them and more space for comfort.

**COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS****Positives:**

- Saw one house that was extremely well prepared. Even had hose ramps on his driveway! Gave him the thumbs up.
- Some houses were well prepared.

### Negatives:

- High grass fuel loadings around some areas of the refinery.
- Some hydrants at the refinery were not working.
- No obvious emergency plans at the refinery for first responders. Red emergency tubes??
- Some Cookernup residents were not prepared. Yarloop probably wasn't either!
- Many residents remained at home unprepared or left it too late to leave.
- Verges and Shire Reserves in Cookernup need urgent attention.
- Too many people in the community were releasing horses and herds of cattle to roam so they could escape the fire but this puts fire crews at an elevated risk.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Earlier intervention by locals to additional ploughing/fire breaks on rural land when they saw the fire in their locality similar to what we saw in Northcliffe.
- Insist on low fuel zones on perimeter of town sites.
- Enforce the 20m building protection zones around houses and buildings.
- Enhanced fire protection zones around fire stations.

### OTHER

- Spouse/Partners – needs to be some sort of system to keep partners/spouses informed of how crews are going and when crew changes will occur and expected home as crews are generally too busy to contact home.  
Suggestion that each brigade nominate a member (either FF or auxiliary) to be advised of the crews who are away and then updated on their movements so they can phone/text spouse/partners.
- Farmers and Livestock – Many farmers were stopped from getting back to feed livestock. Understandable there are safety issues letting them into a fire ground but this is their livelihoods and livestock.  
Suggestion – Look at ways that farmers can be safely escorted back to their farms to inspect/feed livestock.
- Crew Requirements/personal items – Many crews who had not been away before were unsure what to take and brought unnecessary items which meant there was a lot of gear in the trucks.  
Recommendation – Circulate the list again of what you need to consider/take when going on out of shire deployment. [REDACTED] list)

Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
West Perth

28 - 2 - 2016

Dear Mr Ferguson

Congratulations on your appointment and I wish you well and success in your onerous task.

Rather than retype, I have enclosed original copies of letters sent by me to various people in prominent positions with the ability to influence our fire situations in recent past and future history. The commissioner of FESA being the only one to respond (I wonder why)

I hope the correspondence is self explanatory, if not I would welcome the opportunity to clarify anything required.

Having read of your vast experience many of my quotes are already known to you but many of them pertaining to fires seem to be missing from the vocabulary of West Australians, such as prevention is better than cure and should involve many agencies in establishing guide lines as a prerequisite to living in fire prone areas.

It has always been my belief that any person, agent, shire or city selling or developing land or property in a known danger area should be responsible for presenting a list of do's and don'ts similar to a product disclosure statement (PDS) to the client and either or both should be responsible for the requirements to be carried out.

This PDS should be produced by personnel such as shire and fire fighting authorities directly connected to these catastrophes should set in place a strict curriculum satisfactory to the situation and be empowered to enforce the rules.

We get a firebreak notice each year, why not an all encompassing PDS before entering into a hazardous area and thus eliminating the excuse of not knowing.

At this point in time most property owners are confused because of the inconsistencies (a) from shire to shire, conflicting input from Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and even neighbouring properties (these are easily pointed out)

Having said all that it is my belief that once a fire is started experienced or trained firemen should be in charge. It is a well known fact that fires can be unpredictable and change in an instant and split second decisions need to be made leaving no time for endorsement by a superior officer or person from another department ie EPA with contrary vested interests

Example: My first encounter with CALM now EPA was in Boya a suburb in the Darling Range in aprox. 1998 in densely timbered surrounds and faced with the decision to burn-

### Bushfires more ferocious

As lightning lit up our skies last fortnight we marvelled at the spectacle but watched with concern as the storm rolled south. Lightning sparked 111 fires and for the second time this year our capacity to respond was tested.

Fuelled by hot weather and gusty 100km/h winds, one fire tragically claimed the lives of four people. The untold story is

of the lives saved while fighting these fires. All those involved deserve our thanks.

As WA begins its recovery, our thoughts go to South Australians battling landscape fires in horrendous conditions.

We must accept that climate change is turning the screws on the severity and ferocity of bushfire.

As Commissioner, I will be looking at how best to protect this State and its people in these changing times.

But being ready for a bushfire is a shared responsibility. I urge everyone to prepare your property and have a bushfire plan.

Stay alert and stay safe.  
Wayne Gregson, WA Fire and  
Emergency Services Commissioner

*Perth, WA 24/11*

back or lose control, our OIC was obliged to seek permission to do so by radio. In the interim the firemen took the initiative to do the burn-back.

The end result by the time all parties had conferred the fire was safely under control. To me it was common sense!

Recent reports from fellow firemen now serving and mentioned in news reports from Yarloop and seen at the Mundaring-Parkerville fire, this is not uncommon, where many machines are standing idle apparently awaiting orders or perhaps water bombers. (It was rumoured that it was not safe to proceed) If this is true there is something sadly amiss.

Again from experience, the only time a fire crew should be idle is when they are on watch for flare-ups behind the main attack, not talking which is a tendency, mostly of young and inexperienced firefighters, hence the value to the fiery of vigilant property owners

Questions to be answered: Are there too many outside or inexperienced influences compromising good firemanship, for example and from my own experience, how many of these "heads of departments" have actually faced or fought a raging bush fire or how many times.

I refer to my letter to Mr Gregson Commissioner of FESA, obviously a very learned former policeman but has he been there and in what capacity

I took exception to his throw away line "get used to it" in reference to the loss of property in a statement to our local newspaper.

From one who has lost every possession to fire, you don't "get used to it" you live with it for ever and you learn to fight like hell to prevent it happening to anyone else.

As to his (enclosed) letter to the editor "bush fires are more ferocious". Where did he get this experience, certainly not from the bush fire that passed over my turnout in the 80s?

Who was responsible for the decision not to deploy the DC-10 super tankers? This flew in the face of every experienced fireman's creed "if in doubt turn out" and so they should have this time..

Has the introduction of fire bombers changed the long established routines and practices of ground crews for better or worse? Maybe some revision on combined strategies would help.

I have witnessed bombers unloading on a fire 10 feet from a firebreak and road whilst fire units were present.

Are firefighters becoming too dependant on aerial assistance?

To a lesser degree, though very little to public in my shire; we have Community Advocates overseeing the "be prepared campaign", most I have questioned have little or no experience and have never actually been near a bushfire, hence we have the difference between theory and practice.

We know we need the theory but try telling that to a fire

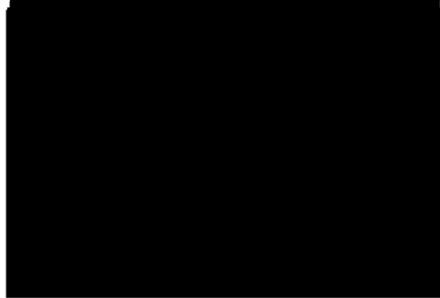
Politicians: Last but by no means least, most servants of the public today are petrified by the ramifications of the politically correct brigade and most of the hierarchy are loath to make decisions off their own bat so to speak, no matter what rank they hold in the (too long) chain of command.

It is time for our political representatives to bite the bullet and legislate for a protective mechanism that will protect servants such as paramedics, police and of course firefighters whilst on active service.

Fire fighting can be a hazardous and many times dangerous occupation and anyone who is not prepared to face-up to that should find another occupation but everyone who does face-up needs to know they have the backing of the establishment behind them.

I am grateful for the opportunity to voice an opinion on the subject that has played such a big part of my life

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

PS. My credentials for writing to this enquiry are: I come from a family of dedicated firemen. Our father and his six sons were all volunteers originating in Geraldton in the late 1800's. Four went on to be career firemen a 5<sup>th</sup> (a volunteer) was awarded the AFSM for his services rendered and a nephew is still employed with FESA at this point in time and I am disappointed about the results and reports of the industry we all served faithfully for so many years to the best of our ability

A small black rectangular redaction box covering a few lines of text.

3

*A PREDICTION. REVISED  
written to WA Newspaper  
but not published.  
REFERENCE TO PREVIOUS  
BUSH FIRES  
19-2-16*

## The Bush Fires

### Have we learnt anything?

Now that the smoke and haze has cleared from the Victorian bush fires (Black Saturday) and the Royal Commission is in progress, where we may expect to see much departmental finger pointing and some Governmental handballing. However, it won't take long for them to become a distant memory and another part of Australian history, except of course, if you were directly affected!

Perhaps it is now an opportune time to discuss the subject rationally, in regards to our own State, WA, and more especially our Darling Range escarpment areas

I fought fires for nearly 40 years, both as a volunteer and professionally. The final 15 years from The Midland Fire Station, the most easterly of the Metropolitan Fire Service (now known as FESA). Further east and north was dependant on volunteers, Shire or bush fire-fighters, needless to say there were some interesting episodes.

Ask any fire fighter today for an opinion about Darlington, Greenmount, Kalamunda and surrounding districts and he/ she will probably tell you, not if, but when will it be our turn to follow Tasmania, South Australia, NSW and now Victoria.

It appears only a matter of time (I hope I'm wrong).

Will we be prepared? History suggests "No." Why not?

Mainly because; After the cooling down period of the previous disasters the majority of people who choose that particular lifestyle, slip back into their idealistic attitude that it is their right to live how and where they wish, which of course is correct. What they seem to be missing is the responsibility that goes with the privilege and the lack of strictly policed guidelines by the various responsible departments of prevention which should be attached to each building permit by each Shire and strictly adhered to.

I cannot remember the number of times we were abused for simply trimming a tree to expose the delineated markings of the fire service hydrants or a friendly warning on "good house keeping" (clear excess debris)

Put very simply; The Victorian man who defied his council and made his house fire safe, was charged to the tune of \$150,000 but at the end of the day he is alive and his house is still standing

Fire bunkers have proved their worth in the East and should be a compulsory prerequisite and it should be standard practice for power lines to have spacers to prevent sparks from touching wires, to name but a few examples.

No person should live in a house with only one entry and exit route. (no alternative means of escape) This is not uncommon in Western Australia, Ellenbrook and The Vines are but two recently corrected examples of this ( we did not learn from Ash Wednesday in SA) Neither did Victoria!

Fire drills and education should be part of the permit to live in such areas.

When we see TV footage or newspaper photographs, how often do we see the local residents inadequately dressed in shorts, thongs and "T" shirts trying to stop a raging bush fire (you never see a fireman dressed that way). How many of them even think of contingency plan?

One of a fireman's greatest assets in bush fires is the old adage of fight fire with fire! At the time of my retirement a fire officer was obliged to seek permission from the Conservation and Land Management Dept. (CALM) before burning back. If this ridiculous rule still exists, I suggest it should immediately be rectified.

As winter approaches and the memories of bush fires fade into the distant past, so the confidence of those not directly involved, returns, and next year's dangers are again put on hold and often forgotten. What a pity!

Lest we forget, a burnt human being, either dead or alive, is not a pleasant sight or memory and people in these exclusive areas need to be constantly aware of what can happen and how quickly.

Probably, not so well known to many of these people is that thousands of man hours have already been spent by fireman and their helpers, protecting their right to live as they wish, often while they are away from home or asleep at night and it probably bears remembering the other old adage "while you may be running to save your life these men and women are usually running in the opposite direction" to save your property.

We have had plenty of warnings and examples to guide us.  
Will we take advantage of "Hindsight"?  
I sometimes wonder what price we really place on our life.



WRITTEN WHEN SHIRES WERE  
ATTEMPTING TO RE-INSTATE THE  
LAPSED FIREBREAK RULES

The Mayor and Councillors  
City of Swan

13-3-2012

Dear Councillors,

At the beginning of summer people in The Vines, who own or reside on land in excess of 1,000ms were issued with firebreak notices, which appears a normal reaction following the Roleystone report of last year and I assume all similar landowners in the shire received these notices

I am aware of some ratepayers who endeavoured to fulfil their obligations according to the notices, some at exorbitant and ill affordable expense to themselves.

I am also aware of many who choose to ignore the instructions altogether and some who chose the alternative option when there was "no" impractical obstruction to installing a proper firebreak

The irony of the above scenario is; the percentage of bona-fide firebreaks, according to law, in the Swan would register in single figure digits and although summer has officially ended the fire danger is at its peak and at this point in time there appears no obvious evidence or intention to rectify the situations mentioned above

I am fully aware that many built up areas are not conducive to consistency in firebreaks especially when bound by non-compatible Shire and Dept of Conservation rules but it leaves a very unsavoury taste in ones mouth when one resident parts with \$1400 (for fear of the consequences) in an endeavour to comply only to look across the road and see nothing done at all. And no consequences applied.

The question is why not and what will happen next year?  
No, I do not have a personal axe to grind!

Yours truly,



PS. The writer is a retired fire-fighter of 40 years experience as both volunteer and professional who spent his last 20years stationed in the Swan and certainly believes in strict fire control procedures and also believes in fairness to everyone.

7-3-2013

*written after the loss of 70? or 80  
houses in the Mandaring area*

Mr W Gregson

Commissioner of FESA  
20 Stockton Bend  
Cockburn Central

Dear Mr Gregson

I am a concerned, retired fire-fighter of plus 40 years service in both voluntary and professional service of which my last 15 years were spent at Midland fire station (retired 1990)

I am still constantly asked for advice and assistance, mainly by confused and frustrated friends and neighbours

Midland was and probably still is the last professionally manned station between the hills and bush voluntary fire-fighters who at that time were far less equipped and trained than they are today. I might also suggest that the professional equipment was sometimes questionable for the terrain it operated in. We certainly did not have aerial appliances or the technology that is available now.

To the best of my knowledge (and the records should support) there was as many or more fires then as there is today and definitely the same locations continue to burn regularly. I and my fellow firemen of that era have no recollection of having lost one house or life and evacuation was a rarely if ever used commodity. In fact the opposite may have been the more likely "option", with their local knowledge, willingness to help and desperation to save their treasured possessions made them as equal to many volunteers.

Some of the questions I and the older brigade ask are; what has changed so much to reverse the statistics mentioned above.

Are theorists overriding practical and experienced firemen?

Are there too many departments involved in fires that follow independent agendas? (I think I could point out one or two instances lacking communication and coordination)

In the late 80's CALM (EPA) as they were known, were just getting actively involved with the fire service. Their theories and practices were almost in exact contrast to good firemanship and one of fireman's greatest weapons (burning back) was being eroded. Does this conflict still exist? If so it shouldn't! Firemen should be in charge of fires!

I repeat, I have a fair knowledge of the responsibilities and duties of firemen and the authorities, pertaining to fires but I had the misfortune during the past weeks to witness first hand, some of the most diabolical and inane (bordering on stupid) activities associated with the service I and our whole family have proudly and actively represented for more than 100 years.

The "diabolical" included evacuated residents watching under threat of arrest, (I was threatened without getting out of my car) golfers continue to walk, ride and play among our houses and The Vines resort allowed to carry on normal business. (You might know one of the golfers and friend, Dennis Perich, to whom I pointed out this situation.)

I am aware also that you have a most onerous task as Commissioner of such a service as FESA (that does not necessarily qualify you as a fire-fighter as such in the direct line of duty) however, I am assured by a mutual acquaintance of us both, that you are the right person for the job and will succeed, therefore I would not like to lose your interest with rehemms of useless writing that would go the same way as many such letters and I would dearly enjoy some input into what appears to be escalating into a monumental problem which in my view is isolating the public from the firemen albeit that neither of them are to be blamed, whilst their most treasured possession is under threat.

It is true that residents of The Vines were receiving outdated information by phone and radio to evacuate hours after they were in fact, with identification, permitted back into their properties (some even headed for relatives in distant suburbs for accommodation)

There is much more but the enclosed copy of a letter sent by me to our local shire in 2012 may be an indication of the social unrest in many outer suburbs.

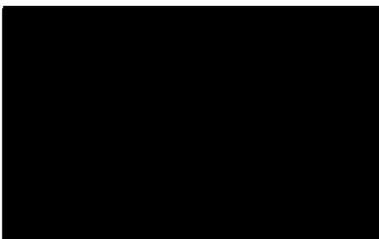
25 years ago firebreaks and burn-offs were compulsory and it was the shires and other authorities which allowed this to lapse. They are now endeavouring to re-educate people in one fell swoop and at great unforeseen costs and consternation among a mish-mash of pseudo fire-breaks and preparedness.

In a nut shell, there are piles of literature, talk and suggestion handed out but a lot of it is just that and so full of holes it leaks.

Try following (as I have) many of the suggestion put forward by the Community Advocates (some who have never seen a bush fire let alone been to one ) such as phone numbers supplied for advice and information or a simple burning permit and you may be enlightened to the frustration

If you have read this far, I thank you for your time and the opportunity to contribute, which ever way it is viewed

Yours sincerely & passionately



SENT TO THE LETTERS EDITOR OF THE WEST. NEWSPAPER WITH THE INTENTION OF CREATING A FOLLOW-UP ARTICLE. NO RESPONSE (I BELIEVE MR MCKEON MAY BE A HILLS RESIDENT TO WHOM I MADE REFERENCE TOO!)

27-12-2013

Attention:

Mr Craig McKeon

I spoke to you by phone shortly after your excellent editorial of Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013 regarding bush fire and I thank you for at least listening to what I had to say and consenting to have a look at comments I had to put forward and I have taken the liberty of sending some items relevant to the overall picture, for your perusal, including my original letter to the Shire of Swan, Commissioner Wayne Gregson and my own 10 commandments for people who have asked me for advice, to view as you see fit and if nothing comes of it there is no harm done. I can only but try!

The subject as a whole is too complex and fragmented, brought about by so many departments surrounded and protected by individuals, (commonly known as castle building) many who have never faced a fire and when questioned, are reliant on theory alone and the usual backstop of safety which immediately curtails all other logical input. One consequence of this is the great amount of frustration and consternation among property owners in connection with this latest push to be prepared and in my opinion are alienating themselves from the general public.

In fighting fire, safety and risk are always one's constant companion and need to be acknowledged as such, (no different to driving a vehicle or going to war) and my advice to anyone who denies this is: Look for a more suitable pastime!

As suggested to Mr Gregson; the best way to find out if your strategies are achieving their purpose is to test them as a private citizen. The experience could be enlightening as I doubt that things have improved much since I attempted that personally. Again I thank you for your attention, if only to appease my passion and I can have peace of mind knowing I have tried.

Kind regards



PS. Just for the record (no, I'm not a nut case) I come from a large family of fire-fighters both volunteer and professional and possibly one of very few which can boast continuous fire service commencing in Geraldton over 100 years ago and still have one serving member in the Metro brigade today.



The Editor  
West Australian Newspapers

Attention: Mr Craig McKeon

27-12-2013

Dear Craig

On Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> an interesting and thought provoking editorial appeared in this newspaper, asking many pertinent and poignant questions about living with bush fires, to which I believe there are some answers and perhaps solutions

A good independent, investigative journalist would get great satisfaction in unravelling what has taken place over the past 20 plus years in the professional and volunteer fire services which is now incorporated in FESA

Prior to retirement in 1990 I served the last 15 of my 40 plus combined years at Midland Fire Station, the outmost manned station in the Metropolitan fire district, where much of our time was spent safeguarding the welfare of 'the hills' residents. Each shift consisted of 1 Officer and 2 firemen with radio contact to headquarters in Perth and back-up by local volunteers and bush brigades as well as nearby local Metro stations

Upgrading of a fire situation would consist of one control unit (M C U)

It would be fair to say that technology was limited in those days and some of the vehicles were questionable for the terrain they were operated in.

It would also be fair to say, and written records should support, that we fought as many if not more of the same fires which regularly burn today. The same records should show, we did not lose one house or life and never in my memory did we evacuate anybody. Quite the opposite in fact, we encouraged the help and knowledge of many extra eyes and hands of local people prepared to fight to protect their treasured possessions, and they did.

The question asked is: What has changed so much in this period of time to change the status quo?

Stating the obvious; Prevention is better than cure!

Prior to 1990 it was compulsory to clear, burn or firebreak hazardous blocks especially in the hills and surrounding areas, to the satisfaction of shire inspectors or fire officers.

Failure to do so was followed by consequences.

In the late 1980s we experienced the first effects into fire fighting of EPA or CALM as it was known to me then, whereby one of firemen's most valuable assets, 'back burning' became suspect and questionable, as was erosion caused by firebreaks and in very short time these preventative resources became a shambles of makeshift look-alikes which apparently appeased the rule makers

It is worthy of note that there are people who have lived in my present suburb for 25 yrs and never been aware of any rules pertaining to firebreaks until confronted by the latest onslaught of exorbitant expense to bring their properties up to date.

Obviously the upshot of the Roleystone disaster

Not to mention the millions of taxpayer's dollars now being paid in advertising 'are you prepared' and organised instruction lectures.

Para. 4, 5 and 6 of the editorial rightly points to the foibles of chasing the idyllic lifestyle and again it takes fire fighting and daunting experiences to get the slightest glimpse of the mindset of many of these people.

Therefore, I suggest the solution lies with the Shire in conjunction with 'fire' authorities to draw up strict stipulations covering all aspects pertaining to bush fires including a fire shelter, immediately a real-estate agent or developer applies to sell or build in these areas. Too many people believe it is their god-given right to build what, where and how 'they' like but if and when the time comes, it is someone else's responsibility to save their property and perhaps, their life.

First example; no house should ever be built in an area which has only one means of escape and I emphasise that with rights should come strictly adhered to responsibility and/or consequences.

Para, 8, 9 & 10 of the editorial rightly applauds the efforts of the State Government in encouraging property owners to take some responsibility, albeit that relaxing the rules of yesteryear has brought about the expensive exercise today.

It needs to be pointed out that theoretically the promotions have a nice ring to them but again from personal experience I question the practicability of the exercise when it now appears the number one priority of the first attack fire officer is to order complete evacuation of a district thereby rendering the plan (other than prior clearing of excess debris) very ineffective in as much residents are advised by telephone, radio, or if at home, personally by police, to leave immediately, irrespective of how far away the fire is.

Note; we don't need to be reminded that a fire officer in today's litigious climate may well be 'covering his own backside' as was questioned in the Keelty Report. Did they evacuate too soon?

Again from experience, immediately you evacuate you remove a thousand/s watchful eyes and helpful hands (not everybody is a complete idiot) and many are prepared to take the chance to defend the most valuable monetary asset we are ever likely to own.

This too has been promoted on television.

Evacuation should be on a voluntary basis and a last not first resort.

I know you can't be arrested but how many other home owners do, especially faced with a policeman threatening to do so?

If out, you are not permitted through the road blocks to operate or oversee you're prepared defensive strategies such as hose layouts and damping down etc. as describe in the lectures given

It is true as the editorial also pointed out that burning embers are a major threat to property, even moreso an unprotected one. I would argue that ember attack is sometimes more threatening than the fire itself, because someone is usually watching the fire but embers have an agenda of their own and how does one see and defend against them from outside a road block or premature evacuation.

Based on any activity in our lives, there is an element of safety/risk in almost everything we do, be it sport, leisure and especially driving a car or going to war, yet we are encouraged to do so.

By comparison how many lives are actually lost to bush fire, especially, other than those not involved at the fire front?

Question that spring to mind:

Is there too much red tape and political correctness being attached to fire fighting when in fact fires require 100% concentration?

Are there outside influences not pertaining to the actual fire, curtailing the fire fighter at the fire front and should other departments outside the fire service develop a closer working relationship (experience) with the actual fire fighter?

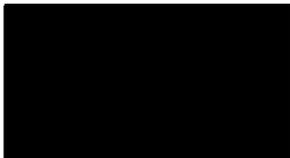
Has the introduction of aerial fire fighting changed the basic techniques of firemen on the ground, such as creating a sense of false security?

Are the reports and sizes of fires in the East States affecting the way we attack fires in WA –it might appear so?

What was learnt from the Keelty Report and how much of it has been implemented?

Should the evacuation orders be more closely looked at? I firmly believe more homes are likely to be lost if not.

Sincerely & passionately yours



CERTAINLY WITH NO DISRESPECT TO  
YOURSELF - I DID READ THE KEELTY  
REPORT.

NOT PRINTED

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** "Letters WA News" <letters@wanews.com.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 15 January 2016 11:53 AM  
**Subject:** The Editorial

I wonder if the Services Minister will heed your advice "Francis must accept Valid questions over fire polices" (Editorial 14/ 1) maybe he should question some of his advisers. Make no mistake, fire fighting can be a very dangerous and depressing but also rewarding occupation  
After 40 years of chasing fires in this State I doubt if many citizens would question the courage and dedication of their fire-fighters on the front line, however, that does not necessarily apply to those with authority to issue instructions from a distance and gained from people with conflicting opinions and strategies. 'Fires don't read the manual of theories and policies and many decisions are created instantaneously.'  
Yes, good move, another "broad and deep inquiry". This can only be a repeat of Mick Keelty excellent previous performance, but who will be paying attention, same people as before? Perhaps the powers that be such as DFES Shires EPA etc. might try checking and revising some of the successful preventative measures applied 35yrs ago but have since lapsed into a quagmire of red tape and confusion of ineffectiveness.  
I certainly agree with the Editor in regard to the DC-10 super tankers and the DFES Commissioner and Mr Francis would be well advised to read the old adage in the fireman's mythical bible "If in doubt turn out" and that is what should have happened in this case.  
By no means least; the evacuation policy needs to be reassessed and contrary to the modern trend where evacuation appears to be a first and basically compulsory option.  
How do people implement their "fire preparedness" when they can't get to it, but don't listen to me, read the Keelty report of the Roleystone fires.



Late mail:

Any good fire-fighter can tell you that the normal firebreak will not stop a bush fire, the community advocate will agree. The fireman will also tell you it is an excellent place to start burning back, the EPA will dispute this.

The advocate will tell you the firebreak is for easy access on the fireground, this ex fireman would question the amount of time spent on a firebreak, he would also question the amount of driver training the non-professional firefighter has undertaken for the task he/she is performing. I too was a volunteer but not until I became a professional and passed the advanced and defensive driving tests did I realise what I did not know and where I could and should not go

I would delight in pointing out some of the outrageous and unwarranted demands placed on residents more so where no good fireman would risk himself or his machine

*Written for friends  
and neighbours who have  
asked for help*

Ten Commandments in the threat of fire.

**“Try not to panic”** move briskly, think clearly and do not run unnecessarily.

(1) Start and run full reticulation system (restart if on short cycle)

(2) If your air conditioner is evaporative type **“Turn it off”**

(3) Close all doors and windows

(4) Check that all available hoses are connected to taps and laid out to cover maximum distances around house

(5) Test all joiners and connections under water pressure (turn water on) if available carry extra joiners in pocket

(6) Fit any extra hoses for maximum distance (a) on side of house from which the which the fire is approaching (b) where most flammable trees are nearest the house

(7) Commence spraying water into all gutters and if possible block down pipes from gutters (these blockers consisting of sand in a plastic bag should be prepared at all times)

(8) Hose down shrubs and trees as far as your hoses will reach

(9) Your greatest assets are Concentration, Vigilance and Nerve.  
Watch for burning embers and put them out

(10) **“Dress”**

It is vitally important to wear long trousers and long sleeved shirt, cardigan or jumper (preferably woolly)

Covered shoes or boots (preferable leather) socks and head cover (Hat) and gloves if available.

And good luck



WRITTENE SENT TO LIAM BARTLET (TWICE)  
AFTER his COLUMN (29-11-15)  
NO RESPONSE

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** <reception@9.com.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 4 December 2015 6:16 PM  
**Attach:** FESA Commissioner.doc  
**Subject:** Emailing: FESA Commissioner

Attention: Liam Bartlett

Dear Liam

In keeping with your article (Time for answers S/T 29/11) I have attached self explanatory letters I have written and sent to the Commissioner of FESA and the City of Swan after the second major catastrophe in recent times and the untimely warning in a letter to a newspaper by the Commissioner "to get used to it"

There are answers out there and (a) someone needs to bight the bullet and challenge some of the red tape (legislate if necessary) which leaves emergency services (firemen) open to litigation in the line of duty

(b) Evacuation should be a voluntary last resort - not a first option.  
What use is all the advertised preparedness if you are unable to put it into practice?

Read the Kelly report to verify this comment!

Obviously fire fighting can sometimes be a very dangerous and hazardous occupation and anybody who is not prepared to face the above mentioned, get out and let in someone who is

If you have read this far, thank you for the opportunity to be involved and for putting it in front of the public

[REDACTED]

Ditto attachment to City of Swan

Thanks again

[REDACTED]

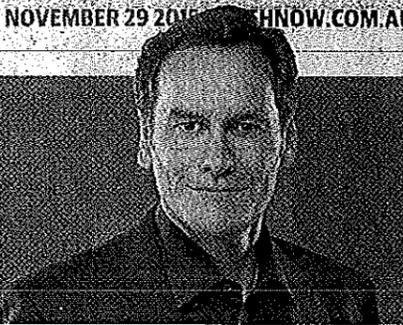
27/02/2016

liambartlett@nine.com.au

# LIAM BARTLETT



@LiamBartlett9



Kym Curnow



Anna Winther



Thomas Butcher



Julia Kohrs-Lichte

# TIME FOR ANSWERS

**Were fatal fires an unstoppable natural disaster, or was reaction time too slow?**

**T**HE official start to summer is still two days away but already we've had nearly a month of what the Department of Fire and Emergency Services call the bushfire "season".

After Perth's warmest October on record (since 1897), a hot November and very patchy rain, conditions have been ripe across big swathes of the state for potential fiery disasters.

That's not a scientific appraisal by any stretch – it's a back-of-the-matchbox assessment by anyone with a basic awareness of the weather and the Australian bush. And that's one of the reasons last week's tragedy along the south coast, near Esperance, makes such little sense and should prompt a lot more questions and analysis of the lack of early intervention.

It may be that DFES bureaucrats have been too busy launching advertising campaigns asking "are you bushfire ready?" to be truly ready themselves.

Or it could have been a unique convergence of events that nobody could reasonably have made an impact on under any circumstances. Either way, those with the power to probe, from the Coroner down, owe it to the four souls who perished to find the answers and ensure it's not repeated.

One thing that is certain is the science that DFES is privy to on a daily basis. At its state operational centre in Cockburn, a full-time meteorologist is stationed to provide daily briefings on weather conditions and threat potential.

With a high degree of responsibility the Bureau of Meteorology is charged with forecasting all-important wind shifts around specific hot spots and most importantly, predicting an area's "fire danger index rating", ahead of any outbreak. This is a complex measure, which includes temperature, relative humidity and wind speed as well as the dryness of surrounding vegetation and the fuel load

some 30 years and had just begun to be harvested, making that fuel load especially high.

As it happens, the bureau's daily briefing to DFES on the Monday, more than 24 hours before anyone died, delivered a fire danger index rating of 250 to 260. Putting that into perspective, that's worse than the day of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria that claimed 173 lives and

Notably, prior to the Victorian tragedy, this rating system stopped at an upper limit of 100. In the wake of Black Saturday, a more comprehensive gauge was designed for a better, national system that more accurately reflected potential danger.

So, with such a dire reading calculated by real scientists, it was no surprise at all that the

Why was it caught napping? Why wasn't a lot more done a lot earlier? Remember, parts of these fires were sparked by lightning strikes on the Sunday, two full days before they became uncontrollable.

It's known that from the Thursday prior to the fires, DFES was being informed in the bureau's daily briefings about potentially

warning of that magnitude would prompt a mobilisation of extra resources either into the immediate zone or placed on standby, ready to be dispatched. But it appears neither occurred.

This columnist has learnt of local farmers making calls to fire authorities as early as 6.30am on Tuesday, worried about the size of flames in

before four people were incinerated.

The reason for the lack of back-up was a fire near Albany, said to be using all available water bombers, but if one fire 470km away can paralyse this farming region to such an extent, then DFES must go back to the drawing board.

Questions also need to be answered as to why local crop-dusting pilots who were more than ready to take to the skies were threatened with a loss of licence if they flew near the blaze.

It should be remembered that the farmers who were fighting these fires in the early stages were hardly amateurs. Sure, they are volunteers, but between them they have decades of experience in fire management and they know the local conditions better than any office worker in Cockburn.

When they express such incredulity and disbelief in how these fires were managed, the top brass at DFES should listen very carefully.

Ironically, questions to DFES from this columnist this week went unanswered.

There were other issues at play in this disaster that also need to be examined, including the ongoing problems with telecommunications and the ability to cut firebreaks in national parks and reserves. But the wider community needs to know that DFES is listening to its own briefings and acting on advice.

Recently the department has offered plenty of its own wisdom. When it asks "are you bushfire ready?" DFES states: "You need to understand your bushfire risk so you can prepare your home, develop a survival plan and know what to do when a bushfire starts". All eminently sensible, but does the messenger need to heed its own clarion call?

It's instructive that DFES's own bushfire bible is called "Prepare. Act. Survive". The tragedy of Esperance suggests

[REDACTED]  
21/1/16

Commissioner,  
Ewin Ferguson  
Yarloop Fire Review/Enquiry  
Perth,

Dear Sir,

Byzer fire-retardent trails,

I understand the Enquiry will focus on the factual history of the tragic Yarloop fire. No doubt it will conclude with a summary along with comments and recommendations.

One of the residents of Yarloop was heard on radio dismissing any suggestion that not enough clearing of trees was done around the perimeter of the town. "Even if we had been permitted to bare-clear 300 metres all around the town, the town would still have burned."

He could well be right.

As a lifetime volunteer firefighter, I have long been advocating the concept of byzer trails being established <sup>at regular spaced intervals</sup> in all Parks, Reserves, wildlife corridors etc, and around all towns wherever the topography permits.

It would not be too expensive for the Government to trial the system initially in one of the smaller fire-prone Reserves.

A byzer trail is not a clean-sweep bare-soil trail. It is a trail where the natural vegetation is allowed to regenerate after the initial clearing with normal land-clearing equipment, as used in agriculture. The regeneration is then rolled every few years with a byzer, which is simply a large diameter steel roller fitted with longitudinal spuds welded on. Any engineering company can make <sup>one</sup> up. I would be glad to describe the agricultural version I had made, for farming.

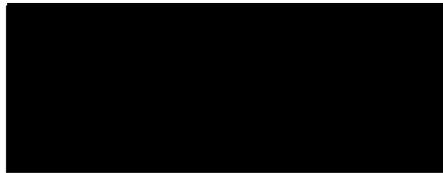
Because the natural vegetation is not threatened, and is allowed to regenerate to the point of seed growth, and because fauna are equally safe, a byzer trail can be as wide as desired, depending on the average height of the surrounding scrub or forest, say <sup>50</sup> up to 300 metres.

The byzer trail allows greater accessibility to fire-fighting vehicles, and just as importantly, provides the ideal line of defence for both vehicles and water-bombing aircraft to most efficiently use their resources, as a co-operating brigade.

Depending on the results of a well-planned trial of the byzer-trail system, it could prove to be more cost-effective for the Government than hazard-reduction burning.

Please distribute copies of this letter to the various agencies involved in fire prevention, and fire fighting, for their consideration.

With thanks, I am yours faithfully,



*Ret. Farmer.*

P.S. Please note two major advantages of the Byzer Trail system:-

1. Eliminates risk of fire escaping from hazard-reduction burning.
2. The bush is not destroyed, simply maintained and only re-treated as it regenerates.

*Y. G.*

Dear Sir,

I would like to introduce you to the historic township of Hamel just off the South West Highway and South of Waroona. It is surrounded by a derelict pine plantation often used as a dumping ground and motor bike track. In the midst of this are numerous fallen trees and a thick assortment of long grass and other rubbish. Along the verge in Pitt Street there is a belt of old red gums, pine and bamboo, some dead, some white ant infested and some about to topple over along with assorted rubbish and mountains of leaf litter deposited in front of all properties. Beyond this to the pines is a firebreak which would prove totally inadequate if a fire were to take hold. It was only a miracle that we weren't added to the carnage inflicted on Yarloop.

Our township is always in the path of the fires which descend from the scarp with this being the fourth and closest we have been to being decimated. Two spot fires were extinguished at the front of the plantation (on South West Highway) and fire was burning to the East, North and South of the plantation. If this area had ignited approximately 30 homes directly behind the plantation would have been raised then the Hamel Eco Park, which is also in a shocking state of fire readiness followed by another large group of houses and farms.

The following needs urgent attention:

1-Clear the verge along Pitt Street and add it to the firebreak; this verge has never been burnt off in the 36 years we have lived in Hamel!!

2-Cornucopia Street has old trees reaching right across the road, some full of white ants and others about to fall on the road with the plantation boundary lined by old trees and rubbish. This needs urgent attention.

3-Berthong Street (a gazetted road) has numerous old trees right on the boundary of some properties.

4- Bethungra Street has no firebreak with a row of old Karri trees beside knee high dry grass. 5- Three or four old red gums on the rear boundary of 13 Pitt Street are about to fall and depositing large quantities of leaves and rubbish on 6 properties.

5-Burney Road along the rail line has never been burnt off.

These are only a few of the issues with the main one being the eradication of the plantation and tidy up of the Hamel wet lands, another disgrace – it is an absolute certainty that if a fire were to erupt here it would be another major disaster. Hamel has an interesting history and is mainly housed by long term residents with the original hall and some parkland in its midst. Unfortunately it has got into an extremely poor state of fire readiness with local authorities all keen to pass the buck. As far as I understand DPAW are mainly responsible with the local shire needing to step up also. So far I have written to DPAW, DFES, Alcoa, the Media and our local MP with no positive response – so do we just wait and when tragedy strikes decide to act??

If possible please come and have a look over this area – a person with your expertise would certainly be shocked!!

Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

WAROONA HARVEY BUSHFIRE 2016 SPECIAL INQUIRY

TERMS REFERENCE 1 A THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRE –INCEDENT BUSHFIRE PREVENTION AND MITIGATION ACTIVITIES

1A Crampton rd Uduc Harvey has a 150 metre sand track which is a part of Crampton rd at the west end ,preventing anyone that does not have a 4wd leaving in that direction .The shire of Harvey has been requested to lime –stone this over the years for the safety off people on Crampton rd ‘in case off a fire by us, and other residents off Crampton rd .this has repeatedly fallen on deaf ears and been ignored.The fire hit us [REDACTED] twice on different intervals. The last fire too hit us came down Crampton rd from the EAST blocking us leaving our property we were trapped and couldn’t leave because off sand track which forms west end Crampton rd .We had to take shelter in our dam. Also on the GPS mapping this road Crampton rd UDUC Harvey shows up as a go through road ,as we are the last property on the road James Pace is forever pulling out stranded bogged vehicles from this stretch of road ,once a fuel truck for aviation helicopter cleaning the power lines ,even got bogged on this stretch of Crampton rd.

1A We have a saw mill on [REDACTED] Uduc Harvey Wa to the east of us our address is [REDACTED] Uduc Harvey ,It has recently had extensions granted and approved by the Shire of Harvey .It was supposed to have adequate fire breaks and a fire protection plan in place checked and approved by the Shire Harvey.Apparantly the firebreaks had trees overhanging them and it appears there was no fire plan put into place and also all the offcuts and old timber had been pushed into the bushland surrounding the saw mill area.,making it a very dangerous situation which I

have been informed by neighbours the shire was aware off. When fire fighters went into the saw mill too fight the fire there were explosions happening putting them in grave danger. There is a home situated next door to this saw mill which the Shire of Harvey said was the legal distance when they approved the mills expansion closer to the home. For the saw mill too expand closer too these peoples home and without the adequate firebreaks and fire plan in place it has put these people in grave danger.

(G) EVACUATION PROCEDURES

works for ON THE 7/1/2016 AT 12.03 PM a fire emergency warning( evacuate Harvey town sight ) was posted too mobile phones When the manager was shown the warnings her response was THESE WARNINGS ARE POSTED HOURS BEFORE YOU NEED TO ACT ON THEM ,She then said IM GOING TO BUY A lotto ticket leaving the store for 20 minutes and not allowing us to close and leave the store. Whilst she was away our area manager rang and told us to close up the store which she argued about upon her return, she held us back 45 minutes putting us in danger. It is obvious that business need training into what evacuations means and how to respond and act on these warnings

Regards

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

WAROONA HARVEY BUSHFIRE SPECIAL INQUIRY

[REDACTED] UDUC HARVEY WA BACKS ONTO A FORESTRY AND PINE PLANTATION ,THE FORESTRY SECTION OFF THIS AJOINING OUR PROPERTY HAS NOT HAD ITS FIRE BREAKS DONE IN YEARS ,PUTTING OUR PROPERTY AT RISK.THE FIREFIGHTERS THAT WERE FIGHTING THE FIRE WERE VERY DISGUSTED WITH THIS  
REGARDS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Ph [REDACTED] email [REDACTED]

My name is [REDACTED] and I am owner operator of a small accommodation business on a 5 acre property 1 1/2 kilometres NE of Dwellingup.

My comment is on access through roadblocks

I have two boundaries adjacent to State Forest which is seldom burnt to reduce the fuel load so am vulnerable to wildfire.

I have lived in Dwellingup since 1978 and on this property since 2002 and have experienced a number of threatening fires including the catastrophic Jan 2007 fire which destroyed a number of dwellings sheds fences etc.

Being aware of the risk I have installed a comprehensive firefighting system. All vulnerable buildings have sprinklers along the gutter line which throw over the roof and 8 to 10 metres on the surroundings. There is a 100,000 litre water tank with pressure pump, always full in summer with a petrol driven firefighter attached and its own protective sprinkler. There is a bore delivering over 100 litres/ minute with a submersible pump and an 11 kva generator connected permanently to the meter box so am completely independent. I have a good quality face mask with smoke filter and an earth covered bunker so am well prepared to stay and defend my property.

My concern is with the inflexibility of the road block system and the excessive conservatism of their location. There are many examples of residents prevented from accessing their properties even when the access road is not threatened. An example is the roadblock at the roundabout on SW Highway South of Pinjarra in the recent fire. This block could have been located one or two k North of Waroona to allow access for local farmers and the Placid Ark roadhouse. The fire was always to the South of Waroona and was being driven away by an Easterly wind. In the event of changed conditions the block could easily be shifted.

My own experience in the 2007 Dwellingup fire was the block at the Nanga rd / Nanga Brook rd junction. The fire was many k's to the West and this road was never threatened. I was prevented from returning through this block after retrieving my generator which I had loaned to a friend in Waroona. We had no mains power for more than a week so the generator was essential.

My plea is to have a more flexible system where a responsible person such as police or DFES could drive the road if uncertainty exists and allow access for locals and essential services. While I understand the need to protect lives and to exclude sightseers I believe the present system is too rigid and risk averse and causes unnecessary hardship to livestock and humans. I would be very distressed to be denied access to a road not immediately threatened, to activate my protection system and lose my property

It should be possible to implement a pass system ( eg like a local tip pass ) or show a rate notice to prove residency.

I also support Roger Underwood's plea for increased fuel reduction burning. The value of this has been well documented in spite of the objections of some. Fuel loads are much higher now than twenty years ago due to official inertia and cost cutting with the resulting uncontrollable fires

Early detection and rapid response is also critical as fires grow exponentially. A recent example of competent early intervention was a local volunteer who singlehandedly ( and against regulations ) with only a rakehoe cut a break around a lightning strike 200 metres in diameter. This fire could easily have become out of control as all crews were away fighting the Waroona fire. If he had obeyed regulations the result could have been catastrophic as it was only a few K;s from Dwellingup

It is time common sense is introduced into our increasingly top heavy and rule driven system

Yours Sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

The Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry,  
Dear Commissioner,

I have lived in the bush all my life, growing up in the Outbacks in Southern Victoria, on a 287 acre farm north of Beech Forest.

I have been between Garlock & Benga since 1971. I can certainly tell you where things have gone so desperately wrong. I am enclosing copy of letter sent to Jim Britza, also the Harvey, Mike Phil Penny and some Shire councillors. They fully support what I am trying to do. I would like to meet you, and put the case for major change.

↳ Verbal evidence

Yours faithfully

51-09746

RECEIVED

29 JAN 2016

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

14<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Mr. Jim Britza  
Fire Officer  
HARVEY SHIRE

Dear Jim,

Following the fire that destroyed the towns of Yarloop, Waroona, Hamel, Cookernup, Harvey and other surrounding areas, I would like to make the following points. I preface my comments that I have not been affected financially or personally in any way.

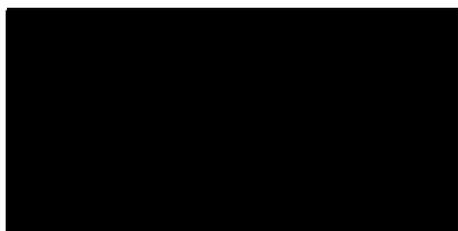
The points I would like to make include:

1. Homes along Carroll Road and Boundary Road in Yarloop were not destroyed regardless of the bush and trees surrounding these areas. The significant reason I believe for this was the 100 acres of vegetables grown on the East side of Carroll Road thus forming a buffer zone.
2. I have made several representations at Shire meetings about burning areas on the East side of the highway in Yarloop to reduce fuel load. I believe it could be 20 to 30 years since any such burning was carried out. At these meetings I was howled down by other people when raising such points.
3. National Parks and public reserves such as roads and railway lines need to be control burnt on a regular basis.

4. Local fire brigades should have a bigger say in the areas that they understand rather than waiting for orders from a higher position.
5. Farmers should be stopped from flood irrigating during a dangerous fire position as it reduces the pressure required for hoses to protect personal property.
6. Trees around houses should not be in falling distance from the building in order to protect them.
7. An investigation into the insurance cover on dozers and machinery used to fight the fires particularly before they get out of control or access to creating buffer zones is blocked.

My reason for this letter is to provide ideas to prevent disaster from fires in the future.

Yours faithfully,



TA

15.2.16.

MR EUAN FERBISON

DEAR SIR.

OWING TO THE EXTREME TRAUMA WHICH WAS INFLICTED UPON CERTAIN PEOPLE WITHIN THE WAROONA, HARVEY SHIRES DURING THE RECENT FIRES, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS MY OBSERVATION AND MAKE A FEW COMMENTS, WHICH I FEEL ARE RELEVANT.

"FIRSTLY," THIS FIRE SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOT BEYOND THE SCARP, "SOMEBODY," WAS ASLEEP ON THE JOB, YOU SEE FIRE AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, YOU EXTINGUISH IT, FULL STOP.

ALTHOUGH THERE WERE MANY FIRE TRUCKS AND PERSONAL ON THE GO, VERY LITTLE ACTION WAS TAKING PLACE, ALLOW THESE FOLK TO DO THE JOB THEY WERE TRAINED FOR, THAT IS, KILL A FIRE WHEREVER IT MAY BE.

IN MY OPINION, FAR TOO MUCH RED TAPE, AND "NO" COMMON SENSE.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IS A WONDERFUL THING, AND INPUT FROM THIS SOURCE SHOULD BE PUT INTO PRACTICE AND UTILISED, NOT DISCARDED.

POLICE ROAD BLOCKS ARE MOST CERTAINLY NEEDED, HOWEVER, COMMON SENSE NEEDS TO PREVAIL TO ALLOW BONA FIDE LOCALS ACCESS TO THEIR PROPERTY WHEN SAFE TO DO SO.

AS FOR MY OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, I HAD INTENDED TO STAY AND DEFEND, HOWEVER OWING TO THE FACT I HAD FIRES ON THREE SIDES, AND WITH THE ARRIVAL OF SEVERAL FIRE TRUCKS I DECIDED TO EVACUATE, THINKING THAT, MAYBE, THE FIREFIGHTERS WOULD KEEP A BIT OF AN EYE ON MY HOME ETC, (NOT TO BE) IT WAS A VERY GOOD NEIGHBOUR WHO, AT -

- I AM CHECKED ON MY PROPERTY AND RAISED THE ALARM, HE THEN COMMENCED, WITH HIS OWN TRACTOR AND LOADER, TO SECURE A FIRE BREAK THROUGH THE BUSH UNTIL HELP ARRIVED, AND I SINCERELY BELIEVE IT WAS HE, THAT I OWE MY SINCERE GRATITUDE AND THANKS FOR SAVING MY HOME, SHEDS, ETC.

NEXT DAY ANOTHER NEIGHBOURS BUSH WAS IMPACTED BY A FIERCE FRONT OF FIRE AND ONLY BY THE GOOD GRACE THAT LOCAL FARMERS, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS BROUGHT THIS UNDER CONTROL, I COULD HAVE BEEN TROUBLED BY ANOTHER FRONT AT THE WHIM OF THE WIND.

NO FIRE FIGHTERS TO BE SEEN TILL TWO DAYS LATER, ONCE AGAIN, PLEASE CUT THE RED TAPE AND ALLOW THESE FOLK TO DO THE JOB FOR WHICH THEY ARE TRAINED, THAT IS, FIGHT THE FIRES WHEREVER THEY MAY BE.

I SINCERELY TRUST THIS ENQUIRY IS NOT JUST ANOTHER PAPER SHUFFLE AS I FEEL THEY NORMALLY ARE, BUT SOME GOOD RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE PUT INTO PRACTICE AND WE CAN REST WITH THE FACT THAT THIS TIME ITS AN ENQUIRY OF SUBSTANCE.

WE DO NOT WANT A FIRE OF THIS MAGNITUDE EVER AGAIN.

I SINCERELY THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS.

THANKING YOU.

YOURS FAITHFULLY



PS: AS I AM NOT ONE WHO IS CONFIDENT IN PUBLIC SPEAKING I WOULD PREFER NOT TO DO SO.

THANKING YOU ONCE AGAIN



From...



---

## Mr Euan Ferguson

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6 Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH  
Western Australia 6005

I was not involved in the Waroona area bush fires but have wondered if this idea for the future could save property and lives.

In a major fire electric power is often the first service to be affected. This then results in pumps that top up the elevated water towers quickly running out of water.

Why is there not automatic or manual electric power back up at water tower sites? Cost of course is the obvious reason but the electric generator required to power the pumps would not be large and the interface into the electrical wiring also not be difficult. I don't know the exact costs but the point is the end result, continued electric power to keep the top up pump running and hence the gravity feed to the town under threat remaining.

I hope if the idea is ever put forward, that it is not dismissed as too expensive, too difficult, without a detailed technical investigation into what could have saved Yarloop and lives to a significant degree.

## Submission – Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

The Crown should be bound by the Bushfire Act as a matter of course for the following reasons:

1. It will ensure that the majority of high bushfire risk land is better managed as it will be bound by the Bushfire Act legislation which will be aligned to the land management requirements the Act enforces on private landowners. By legislating this requirement the State will have no option but to fund agencies to better manage the risk.
2. It will remove the 'current double standard' which legislates for private landowners to mitigate their bushfire risk under the Act but not Crown owned or managed land. The State is hypocritical to legislate & therefore be able to prosecute private landowners to ensure that they mitigate bushfire risk on private property if it is not bound by the same or similar legislated requirements. This is particularly pertinent when the majority of high risk land is under the ownership &/or management of the State.
3. Following on from this the proposed draft legislation that combines the Bushfire Act, Fire Brigades Act & Fire & Emergency Service Act should be progressed to (a) simplify the legislation for all involved agencies & other stakeholders and (b) to enact the requirement to bind the Crown.

Without binding the Crown to the legislation nothing will change and similar events as Waroona & Northcliffe will continue to reoccur.

Submission author:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

My home address is:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED]

## Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry Submission

WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au

Phone: 9482 1750

### CONFIDENTIAL

Author: [REDACTED]

Postal Address: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Farm Address: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Contact details:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Presentation:

Request a private hearing to make an oral submission (1 hour)

Occupation:

Dairy Farmer all my life (68 years), business started 1936, son third generation farmer. Farm at Waroona [REDACTED] Hamel, [REDACTED] and Coolup

Home farm [REDACTED] Waroona has 3 houses, a demountable, 3 sheds, a dairy, stored hay and farming machinery.

### SUBMISSION:

This is the second time that I have been burnt out in 10 years.

Also in the January 2015 Waroona Fires I lost fences and some pasture in the hills.

#### **23rd January 2006**

- 10 years ago we were burnt out from a fire starting in the same place as the January 2016 Fire.
- Cause - unattended camp fire left at Lane Pool.
- Why are open camp fires allowed? Should be a total fire ban!
- We lost fences and pasture but all buildings/houses were saved.
- The fire only burnt Location 10 Waroona - Pitter's farm, then went into Alcoa refinery area and was stopped.
- Why? Because locals were in charge. Using local knowledge and heavy machinery operated by a local contracting firm constructed multiple fire breaks, scalped the ground, clearing areas and used local initiative to save the day.
- Past practice has been protective burning in forest areas. No protective burning has occurred in this area in the last 10 years.

## Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry Submission (Vernon Pitter)

### 5th January 2016 - Tuesday

- 9 - 10 pm fire started in Lane Pool (told by a neighbour).

### 6th January 2016 - Wednesday

- 11 am - concerned as could smell smoke.
- Rang Collie DPAW - referred to Dwellingup, given contact number.
- 11.10 am - rang Dwellingup, put through to person in charge of the fire. Spoke to him at length. Told him property location, size of farm 700 hectares. He looked at his map and said everything was under control at this stage no danger to properties west of the fire.
- 1 pm - rang again. Same Dwellingup person in charge - told me the same story.
- 3 pm - rang again. Same Dwellingup person in charge - told me the same story. I told him I could see an enormous amount of smoke getting bigger and creating its own white cloud. I could smell smoke.
- 4.30pm - rang neighbour (Alcoa farmlands manager). He advised me to get the cattle out of the hills. He was rounding up Alcoa cattle and moving them to the flats (safer ground).
- 5pm - rang Dwellingup. Same Dwellingup person in charge - told me the same story and that the fire was safe and they were happy, that no threat to the western side. I told him I could smell the fire and had ash landing on my lawn.
- As I was recovering from open heart surgery (on 18/12/16) I was house bound and unable to do any physical work
- My son was milking - I asked him to round up the cattle in the hills and bring them to safer ground on the flats. He brought down 200 cattle (many close to calving, some with new calves) that would have been burnt.
- 9pm - my wife went to check the Hamel farm and was stopped by 5 police on the corner James Rd and South Western Highway who were stopping traffic but there were no Bush Fire Brigade (BFB) vehicles or fire fighters to be seen.
- 9.15pm - fire was roaring through our place at a ridiculous speed fanned by 60km hour easterly winds.
- 10.30pm police told us to evacuate.
- We never saw any Bush Fire Brigade (BFB) vehicles or fire fighters on our property during the Waroona fire incident.

## Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry Submission (Vernon Pitter)

### 7th January 2016 - Thursday

- 12.15am - My son rang my cousin [REDACTED] who is a Coolup Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade member (25 years experience) and a farmer to find out where he was, expecting him to be on the fire ground. He woke [REDACTED] up because the Shire of Murray had not activated a SMS to request volunteers for the Waroona fire. he asked him to come and help.
- [REDACTED] left Coolup ASAP but was stopped at Somers Rd by flames 15-20m long and 1.5m high roaring horizontally across the road. No one was there. He returned home and picked up his son and 850 litre slip-on fire fighter unit.
- [REDACTED] could see that the fire was heading straight towards an elderly (80+) couple's farm on Coronation Rd so he rang him and told them to evacuate now. They did not know the fire was headed towards them.
- [REDACTED] and his son went to Coronation Street to check on a few friends to see how they were coping and then came to us.
- 1pm - the 3 [REDACTED] men plus our workers and a few locals fought the fire along the dry creek bed at the back of our houses on the main farm. They saved the houses, dairy, cattle, hay and split the fire in two so that the fire went around the Hamel Settlement with fire only on the northern and southern boundary of the Hamel Settlement as it passed through. No houses in Hamel or the pine plantation caught fire. The locals credit them with saving Hamel.
- Unfortunately our farm on the northern boundary of Hamel lost 5kms fencing, 140 silage rolls and the corn crop was destroyed. The house was not burnt.
- After a lot of discussion I packed the family up (4 adults and 3 children) and we went to Preston beach believing it was a safe option.
- I was stranded at Preston Beach without medication for 3 days which was life threatening.

### 9th January - Saturday

- 4pm - we were evacuated from Preston Beach under escort to Coolup.
- My son never left Waroona and fought the fires and coped with the destruction and welfare of the cattle for the entire incident.

### 10th January - Sunday

- Returned home to Waroona.

## Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry Submission (Vernon Pitter)

### Losses

- On our farm - destroyed 700 hectares pasture, 30kms first grade fencing, 5kms first grade fencing at Hamel, corn crop and 140 silage rolls at Hamel.
- A neighbour adjacent to us had 123 steers burnt which had to be humanely destroyed.
- Another neighbour adjacent to us had 100 cattle (high quality heavily pregnant beef breeding cattle; many close to calving) burnt which had to be taken to Harvey Beef. The same neighbour has since found another 30 - 40 beef cattle who have had their hooves burnt and fallen off so had to go to the abattoir for pet meat.
- The native wild life including kangaroos were burnt, missing limbs and had to be humanely destroyed.
- We lost 12 cattle through the fire - from calving and mastitis (dying within 24 hours) which we have never had before. Usually mastitis can be treated.
- We lost beef cows from mastitis - never lost one before as beef cows never get mastitis.
- We had no electricity for 2.5 weeks, or phone (landline) for 4 weeks.
- No one was allowed in or out of the incident area - the local Waroona electrician was not allowed through the road blocks to get to our farm to connect generators so that we could milk.
- Cows must be milked twice a day to ensure their welfare. If not milked they can get mastitis - which many are suffering from. This was a life threatening situation for the cows.
- When we finally got the generators connected we milked 4 times and had to pour the milk down the drain as the milk tankers were not allowed through the road blocks to collect milk.
- When Western Power came to connect the power they were not happy with us connecting generators, causing us more stress and anxiety. Fortunately the local electrician was present and sorted the issue out on our behalf.
- ██████████ Stock Transport were not allowed in to move stock out - critical situation as no feed or water was life threatening for the cattle. We transported our beef cattle out as soon as Mitchells were allowed in/out of the area.
- Water was a critical issue for us as we lost the water supply when the plastic pipes burnt.

## Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry Submission (Vernon Pitter)

### Concerns

- Same advice provided by Dwellingup 4 times when I rang them over 6 hours on Wednesday 6th January 16 when I knew everything was not ok, had evidence of ash on my lawn and was not listened to.
- Did not have early warning from DFES of the impending danger even though strong easterlies were blowing all day Wednesday and I kept ringing Dwellingup for advice/help.
- Many neighbours have said that fire fighters told them that DFES instructed fire fighters not to enter private property, not to fight agricultural fires and to protect infrastructure.
- DFES would not listen to local advice, with many arguments resulting in increased stress. Many locals angry and frustrated that DFES not working together with them
- DFES did not use local knowledge and would not accept help from a local contracting firm for heavy machinery to fight the fire or allow scalping and clearing of the ground.
- Locals know the area and how to fight local fires - what works and what doesn't work in their area - many fighting fires in Waroona for over 30 years
- No one was allowed in or out of the area initially - many road blocks/angry locals. Locals unable to leave to get generators etc to make their farms operational - concerned not allowed back home when returned. many arguments at road blocks
- Tradesmen were not allowed to travel to farmers to assist; roads closed to local movement; stock transporters had no access to remove cattle leaving many cattle without feed or water; milk tankers stopped; prevented locals from overcoming the many problems they faced in securing their property and welfare of their livestock.
- Local passes need to be issued immediately to allow local people access to necessities and services to repair their property, engage tradespeople, look after their livestock and provide for their personal needs.

The information and times in this submission are given in good faith from memory of the sequence of traumatic events. The local community need to be consulted, included and feel supported by DFES by being listened to and by working together in facing adversity.

Small fires must be extinguished immediately by using all resources available before they become catastrophic events.

I have request a private hearing to make an oral submission.

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 3 May 2016 10:49 AM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** Fire profing townships

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 26 February 2016 3:29 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** Fire profing townships

Because I had a long experience in fighting fires on the west side of the Darling scarp at Pinjarra in the 50s and 60s ,and the Dwellingup fire, I sent an email outlining my experience and stated that I thought I had a good suggestion of how the fire proof towns West of the Darling scarp.

I sent this to several different bodies, but have had no reply.

Looking at the town of Yarloop and speaking in rough terms, there is approximately a kilometre wide strip of bushland about 3 km long of bush close to Yarloop on the East side of the south-west highway.

There are two choices one to get rid of it entirely and replace the trees with a type of tree that doesn't burn as fiercely as our forest, most trees in the world do not explode into fire like ours do.

The second option is to install high-pressure sprinklers to dampen this 3 km<sup>2</sup> at the approach of a dangerous fire situation.

Just east of this about half a kilometre wide and 3 km long is dryland farming.

The proposal is to turn this into irrigated farmland with water stored in holding dams, which would be kept full with low volume continuous pumping from irrigation water West of the township. Water from these storage dams also be used to feed the high-pressure sprinklers.

Someone may suggest that this would cost a lot of money, as no doubt it will, but considering the fact that this is a one-off cost , compared to the repeated costs of fighting fires, not to mention the loss of life, I think the amount for prevention would be insignificant when compared to the current situation.

If there is anybody who is interested in the experiences of a 73-year-old dairy farmer who spent his youthful years West of Pinjarra, then spent 30 years wheat farming in the northern wheat belt and then on to a hobby farm in Gingin and finally a 5 acre block on Neaves road , North of Wanneroo, which joined the pine plantations and bush land ,feel free to make contact. Regards [REDACTED]



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Mr Euan Ferguson  
Waroona Bushfire Inquiry  
SEMC  
Perth, WA

Dear Sir

Although I am a member of the Bushfire Front, and have been involved in the preparation of their submission to the Inquiry, I wish to make an independent submission covering one of the ToR, but not dealt with by the Bushfire Front.

This concerns the issue of bushfire warnings. Attached is a report on this issue.

My view is that the community cannot and should not be given the impression that they will always receive a timely and accurate warning about a bushfire threat. The essential message put out by government should be:

- we will do our best to give bushfire warnings;
- however, infallible warnings that target specific residential areas are not, and never will be possible and should not be expected, except under relatively mild weather conditions;
- this is due to the fundamental unpredictability of fires and the inherent unreliability of communications technology;
- therefore people living in bushfire prone areas must be alert, make an effort on their own behalf to be forewarned, and be prepared to take action in the light of a perceived threat, rather than wait to hear something from the fire management authorities.

In short, I consider it irresponsible to allow people to believe that accurate and timely warnings can always be expected. People living in bushfire-prone areas must be encouraged to be self-reliant, not dependent on an inherently unreliable system.

At the same time, research into all the factors affecting fire movement must continue, and communication systems refined.

Yours sincerely



Roger Underwood  
Forester  
Feb 26th, 2016

# Bushfire warnings

by Roger Underwood

A persistent complaint from victims of the Black Saturday bushfires was that they had “received no warning”. Over and over again we heard statements like this: *“There was no fire anywhere, but the next thing, we had fire all around us. There was no word of warning, and we never stood a chance”*.

This issue has since been highlighted by the Royal Commission in its Interim Report, and is being taken to heart by fire authorities all over Australia. Nevertheless the problem continues to be raised, as recently as the 2016 bushfire that consumed the town of Yarloop in WA

This is a delicate subject, because I don’t want to sound disrespectful to people who lost their lives or suffered in the fires. I realise that many people are perplexed by the way they were engulfed by fire and caught by surprise. I also understand the desire of authorities to get warning systems in place. Officials realise that a failure to deal with this issue in future fires will come back to haunt them if complaints are made to Royal Commissions, Coronial inquiries and the media.

However, the downsides, weaknesses and dangers in bushfire warning systems must be properly understood.

The first problem is that while the behaviour of bushfires burning at low intensity in light fuels is well understood, high intensity fires in heavy fuels, when there are unstable atmospheric conditions, can behave erratically. Intense fires generate their own wind and throw spot fires kilometres ahead. This is the main reason people are caught unawares. One minute the fire may well be “miles away”. But the next minute a high wind brings a rain of burning embers. If these fall into heavy, dry fuels, people rapidly find themselves enveloped by fire. High intensity fires will leapfrog across one ridge to another, and then swirl back, sucked into the intervening valleys and seemingly coming from the “wrong direction”. A bushfire can move from a mild ground fire with one metre-high flames, to an intense crown fire (throwing spotfires) within a matter of minutes.... it is simply a matter of a wind change turning a long flank into a headfire, or of a fire moving from an area of light to an area of heavy fuels.

Very rapid changes in fire behaviour, and mass spotfire generation present a nightmare for people with the job of activating a warning system. Decisions can only be made with very accurate and up-to-date information from the fire. Since the situation at the fire is often confused, and firefighters generally do not have any idea of the big picture, it makes decision-making about whether or when to activate a warning (and to whom) doubly difficult.

A further problem is that rarely do you get one fire at the one time, especially on a bad day. When there is a dry lightning storm, or where an arsonist is at his dirty work, it is not uncommon for several fires to start at about the same time and run parallel with each other. This can confuse efforts at fire detection, mapping, and spread prediction. When many separate fires start to coalesce and interact, fire prediction moves into the realms of the unknown, making it virtually impossible to know who to warn and when, other than in the broadest geographic sense.

Finally, any warning system based on communications technology is likely to break down in a serious bushfire situation. This is especially true of technologies that require mains electricity, which is generally the first to go when there is a fire, or static relay stations like phone towers that can be destroyed by fire or cyclonic winds. To this must be added the well-known problem of communications overload in a crisis situation.

There are two serious dangers with the whole concept of targeted warning systems. The first is that a mass warning will quite possibly lead to a mass evacuation. People leaving the area will choke the roads, and these may well be the same roads on which there are incoming fire appliances. It is not clear to me that the authorities have sufficiently thought this issue through.

The second danger is that the authorities are raising expectations that they may not be able to fulfil. If people are expecting to get, and are waiting for a warning, and the warning does not arrive (for one reason or another), they are going to be set-up for calamity. I hate the idea of community and individual self-reliance being undermined.

To be effective and reliable, a bushfire warning system must meet a number of criteria. It must have access to accurate data on fire location, fuels and weather, together with the fire behaviour algorithms that can predict fire frontal development. It must be able to anticipate wind changes and instantly assimilate new information from a fire where long-distance spotting is occurring. It must be flexible in responding to rapidly changing human as well as bushfire situations. There must be back-up in the event of a technological failure. Above all it must have a large and well-trained team of operators to make everything work under extreme pressure, including experienced and accountable decision-makers. A system meeting these requirements will be expensive to set up and maintain. It will also suffer steady degrade if a few years go by with no major fires.

Such a system does not exist in WA at the moment.

It will be the height of over-confidence to create an expectation in fire-prone communities that they will always receive timely warnings of imminent bushfires. The system will probably work under relatively mild weather and low fuel conditions. But the opposite will always be more likely when a killer bushfire is running. Then people will receive no warning, or warnings will be too late to enable appropriate actions.

There is another very real problem. This is when warnings are issued but are not followed by a fire. In the coming fire season or two we can expect that there will be a (wholly understandable) temptation to overdo the warnings. Fire officers with trigger fingers will not want to face a Coronial Court for failing to push the button. But if fires do not follow warnings, the result will be the “crying wolf syndrome” where people become blasé, and then do not react when there really is a fire.

In my view the first priority for fire authorities should be to optimise the bushfire resilience of towns and communities – in particular reducing areas of heavy fuel within and adjoining residential areas, making houses and road verges safer, setting up local community refuge areas and maintaining a program of regular mild fuel reduction burning in hinterland forests. Secondly, they should be telling people that it is quite likely they will NOT be warned and that they must themselves take responsibility for finding out what is going on and having a sensible plan of action, including evacuation to a safe place well before a situation becomes remotely dangerous. In my view both of these actions will have greater value than spending millions of dollars on “technological-fix” bushfire warning systems.

The fundamental message that our governments should be putting out is this: if you live in, or close to the Australian bush, you should expect to get a bushfire on a hot windy day in summer..... and be prepared for it. To rely on a government warning system is to rely on something that is inherently unreliable.

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, 27 February 2016 10:30 AM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** TRIM: Submission to the Waroona Fire inquiry  
**Attachments:** FESAMtg 35 Minutes 16 Jul 2011-1.docx

**Categories:** Blue Category

Dear Sir

I have been a volunteer with the Wallcliffe Fire Brigade for about 20 years. First of all I would like to say that I have great respect for our local DFES personnel as they look after us to the best of their ability and know and respect our abilities and requirements as firefighters.

I attended the Waroona fire on the second day Thursday 7th January. I was woken at 0230 by a callout requesting personnel to be ready to leave at 0330 for Waroona. Our vehicle was part of a group of about 7 bush fire fighting vehicles from the Busselton Margaret River area with 2 DEFES non fire fighting vehicles. We stopped at a service station at Busselton and were advised to get some refreshments for breakfast, paid for by the DFES personnel. About 15 kilometers south of Waroona on the South West Highway we were stopped at the entrance to the Alcoa refinery as a result of power lines down and a burning bridge further up the road. We then deployed to contain fire on both sides of the road and defend a nearby farmhouse. We had no maps of the area and as a GPS unit (Garmin, Navman types) is not supplied by DFES personnel were using Google maps on their own phones to find out where they were. The map book provided by DFES in our vehicles is a 2008 issue that does not go as far north as Waroona, these maps do not have any of the tracks in forest areas marked anyway and are practically useless. At about 1000 hrs a DEPAW person arrived and gave us a briefing of the situation and showed us a map and promptly disappeared together with the map.

Apparently at some time in the morning one of our DEFES vehicles went to the control point at Waroona to the north of the fire to hand in our T cards but again no maps were given out. We then went into the Alcoa refinery site to defend that property. Again we had no maps supplied or any of the dangers in the site really explained to us. At about midday we were provided with one ham and tomato sandwich for lunch and some water. This was provided by Alcoa staff, and they ran out of bread. To my knowledge there was no food offered by Incident Control all day. That was all we were offered until the end of the shift at 1800.

At the end of the shift we then had to spend 30 minutes going around the fire to the control point at Waroona to get relieved. The only food we were offered there was a roll that had been brought from Margaret River by our relieving crews. I also believe that when we were signed off by our group leaders our T cards were not in the Battle Board but in a pile at the side. This was also the same as happened to a following group from our brigade. If this is correct it meant that Incident Control had no idea we were there or where we were on the fire ground in an emergency.

On the 9th February I left home at 0500 hrs to attend a fire at Harvey.

At that fire we were told at Incident Control that we would not be getting any food delivered to the fireground. All they had on offer were Meat and salad rolls and water. The temperature on the day was 39 degrees. There is nothing provided in the Bush Fire fighting vehicles to keep anything cool and the lettuce roll did not last for more than an hour. The only vehicle at our station with a fridge is a Fire and Rescue truck. As it turned out our group commander did get some salad rolls for us in the middle of the day. At this fire I was requested to provide a GPS location from the WAERN radio as I was next to a loader Control needed to find. I was unable to do so as I did not have my glasses and the radio was below seat height and the figures are about 3 millimeters high. This is how DFES expect me to ascertain my position on a map they did provide that day.

These problems with the provision of refreshments is an on going problem with attendance at fires.

Why cant DFES have a stock of nonperishable food packs permanently on hand, at all regional centers, for delivery to any fireground within a couple hours? Food is always obtainable in the city anytime of night or day, not so in the country.

My biggest worry with attending any wild fire is the lack of an Automatic Vehicle Location system for control to know where the vehicles are, and the lack of a standard GPS unit in each vehicle to enable vehicles to be able to follow their track back out of the fireground.

DEPAW vehicles have had an AVL system looking after them for at least 6 years and according to their personnel I have spoken to it works very well. About 5 years ago our brigade created its own AVL system using the WAERN radio transmissions and offered it to DFES to trial but they didnt take up our offer. At that time DFES were aware of the DEPAW system as per the attachment article 1103-01 Vehicle Tracking. DFES decided to create their own AVL system but I wonder why it has taken so long to create a new one when DEPAW had one readily available at minimal cost. I find it unbelievable that DFES have so little concern for the safety of volunteer personnel that they still have not got a system in action.

I have been attempting to find out, without success, what the specifications of the DFES AVL system are to know if it will do the job for country bush fire brigades not just the metropolitan units. I would appreciate it if you could find the answers to the following questions for me.

Will the information be available to the local brigades at Incident control, running a level 2 fire from a local fire station.

Will the information be available to the local brigades at Incident control, in the back of a private vehicle at the fireground, running a level 1 fire.

Will the information be available to the Division and Sector Commanders in the field in their vehicles on the fireground.

Will the information be available in each vehicle on a fireground.

When will all Bush Fire fighting vehicles be provided with a GPS system.

Thanking you

██████████

28/2/16

Ph) [REDACTED]

Mobile) [REDACTED]

Mr Euan Ferguson  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6 Dumas House  
2 Havelock St  
West Perth 6005.

Dear Sir,

As a member of Uduc Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade (located just west of Harvey), I attended fires throughout the area from Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January to Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January. We attended many small re-ignitions after this in our area mainly caused by smouldering peat swamps.

We attended the Waroona fires on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January. My main concern on this day was;

- Handed in our T card to Incident control centre in Waroona and was then advised to go to further control centre at Alcoa Farmlands off Summers Rd. Second T card handed in and message sent to first control point to remove our first card. Advised of our sector and possible water points. After returning from our allocated sector at approx 3.30pm where we had lost contact with our sector commander during the firefighting, both control points had moved with no advice to us even though we had our two way active at all times and both telephone numbers were on the T cards. We were unable to get fuel at Waroona shire depot or from the oval which was being set up for DPAW. We did manage to get some food from the DPAW people. Being locals, I was able to book our fuel up at the local roadhouse on the guarantee that I would pay it if there were any problems. We returned to the fireground till our crew change where we were advised to return to our station. Our problems were mitigated by the fact that we are locals but for an exterior brigade finding the control point and facilities may have been much more difficult.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of January we fought the fires in our local brigade area including our property which was 75% burnt out. Our CBFCO Phil Penny was aware of our brigades operations and we were controlled through the Cookernup Station control point. During this time and particularly from 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> January, we actively sought out the sector commanders allocated to our area to assist them with any local knowledge they required. We gave them contact numbers, showed them areas of concern on our maps, drew mud maps for them, showed them extra water points and drove them into areas of concern (especially at night). Several of them expressed their appreciation as it is hard to go into an unknown area without any knowledge of the layout and the maps that they had been provided with were less than adequate. We maintained contact with them whilst also remaining in contact with other units based out of Cookernup.

In general we found the communications and control as good as can be expected at such a large fire. Our CBFCO Phil Penny and other leaders within the shire brigades were excellent and provided us with all the support we required. Phil allowed us to work in our local brigade areas in conjunction with other brigades and sector commanders. The assistance from other brigades sent into our area was also excellent and well appreciated.

These issues were discussed at our last brigade meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> February and most members felt the same.

In Summary my main points of concern are;

- 1) Prompt, accurate and effective relaying of information from control points either through sector commanders or directly i.e. changes in location of control points, fuel depots, food areas, water points and fire access (road blocks etc). Without this they are virtually irrelevant.
- 2) Better maps made available to units entering the area. The maps handed out to sector commanders were on too large a scale and not detailed enough.
- 3) Handovers to incoming crews need to overlap to be effective. This ensures that incoming crews are fully aware of a local situation.
- 4) Allocation of a local brigade member to the sector commander to assist with local area knowledge.
- 5) Quality of "blacking out " by some brigades was substandard. Some of this can be attributed perhaps to them not being aware that peaty areas, kikuyu paddocks and pine needles need to be really wet down and penetrated to have any success. Too often we saw fire trucks ignoring smouldering areas as they considered them of little danger even when requested by their sector commanders to black out an area, or trying to mop up by hosing an area from the back of a firetruck .

We were disappointed to not be able to speak to you when you attended Cookernup station as we were unaware that you were coming down. Some of our brigade members were in Yarloop when the fire went through and nearly all brigade members attended the fire at some stage starting on the night of Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January.

Thank you for looking at my submission. I believe I have expressed the concerns of most of our brigade members even though this is a private submission. As you can appreciate, we are still cleaning up after the fires and most members were too busy to put into writing their concerns.

I do not wish to orally present my submission but will do so if required.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

## Submission to Public Inquiry into January 2016 Waroona Fire

This submission is directed to Question 2. (b) of the terms of reference.

I was actively involved at the O'Sullivan fire east of Northcliffe.

The following points have been raised time and time again after all major wild fires with little progress being towards a solution to loss of property, damage to the environment including flora and fauna and loss of life.

In fact in the Waroona and Esperance fires, the situation deteriorated to loss of life, devastation to town and the surrounding properties and the environment.

The biggest concern is in the preparedness for the fire season, ie: mitigation works around towns and prescribed burns to protect the environment and rural properties and the on-ground management of the wild fires.

Below is a list of solutions that, unless implemented, the situation will get worse not better.

1. **Fire mitigation works 1km wide around towns.** A risk analysis plan for every town to be established. Work to be carried out to remove those risks. The funding to be provided from the ESL Levy.
2. **200,000 HA minimum of prescribed burning to be maintained by DPAW.** This prescribed burning to be strategically carried out to protect the environment and rural properties. There are numerous examples of where low fuel areas have stopped fires.
3. **You own the fuel, you be responsible for it.** This to make the owners including the Government, Departments of Government and Private Property owners carry out fire mitigation work.
4. **Restructure of FESA to give clear separation of Town and Rural Bushfire brigades.** This to be implemented to give greater control to experienced fire brigade members with local knowledge to put out the fire without interference from those without such knowledge.
5. **Immediate access to for all firefighters and equipment on all land tenure to put out fires.** This will allow firefighters to put out fires while they are small and manageable and not have a delay for obtaining permission to enter the fire ground as this allows the fire to increase in size and become unmanageable. This permission to include the restricted and prohibited season.
6. **Fire suppression not be limited to saving infrastructure and life but a whole fire suppression attitude be adopted again.** The action of only protecting assets is so stupid as it allows the fire to expand its size unabated and puts further pressure on resources. More assets are threatened as the fire moves through the landscape. At all times the priority should be to control the wild fire using a flank attack to pinch off the head fire.
7. **Access after the fire front passes be prioritised for Essential Services and landholders.** Access be given to Essential Services including Western Power, Telstra, farmers and other landholders needing to return for animal and horticultural purposes as a priority. Some form of training and hazard recognition may be necessary and a ID card to inform check point authority of their status of entry.
8. **Major roads of economic significance need to be open ASAP after the fire front passes.** A task force be set up and trained to carry out the opening of these roads as

soon as possible after the fire has passed. The example of the Forest Highway remaining closed for approx. ten days was not necessary and puts people's lives at greater risk by choking up alternative routes not designed to take that volume of traffic.

I request a meeting with Euan Ferguson to discuss these matters. The author also wishes to orally present the submission at a public or private hearing, so I can give further examples, and how the 8 points I have made can implemented.

Author of the submission is:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Telephone [REDACTED] Mobile [REDACTED] Email [REDACTED]

I have been a bushfire fighter for more than 50 yrs. and have been the FCO of Dunreath Bushfire brigade for 15 yrs. I am a member of Manjimup Shire BFAC and was chairman of BFAC for some of that time.

I also have many connections with FCO's and fire fighters throughout the state of WA with whom I am in regular contact and the message from grass root members is the same or very similar as in my submission.

## Submission to Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

Submitted By: [REDACTED]

Date: 29 February 2016

Mr Euan Ferguson, AFSM

Special Inquirer

Waroona Bushfire

Via Email: [WaroonaInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:WaroonaInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Ferguson

Firstly let me express my gratitude for being given the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry into the recent fires that affected the Shires of Waroona and Harvey and severely impacted the town of Yarloop.

My submission is based on the experience and knowledge gained in my 44 year career with the Forests Department and Conservation and Land Management as a Forester based in the South West region of Western Australia. During this time I was directly involved with all aspects of fire prevention and suppression, including on-line fire fighter to fire boss. In the last 20 years of my career I specialised in Fire Management, which included training, development of fire equipment and the implementation of fire control operations across the Jarrah and Karri forests of the South West and other CALM managed land throughout the state. A particular circumstance that influences my comments in this submission was my involvement in the Dwellingup Fire of January 1961 and the subsequent Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission held into the Dwellingup Fire had similar terms of reference to this inquiry you are heading and with findings that, in my view, are still entirely relevant today.

In January 1961 the Western Australian Government and community were caught out by a lack of anticipation that a fire of the magnitude that eventuated was possible. In the current inquiry one of the terms of reference is: *The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities*. Prior to 1961, prevention and mitigation was practised around assets throughout the south-west forests. There was one significant gap in the fire strategy - a lack of broad scale fuel reduction which led to high fuel loads. This meant that when fires started it was beyond the capacity of firefighting resources to effectively tackle them. Over a period of five days in January 1961, with severe weather conditions very much like that experienced at Waroona in January 2016, lightning caused fires ran at an almost unstoppable pace due to strong winds and the heavy fuels that lay ahead of the bushfire.

Much has changed in the south west of Western Australia in 55 years since the Dwellingup fire however one constant factor remains. That is the general climatic conditions that make hot, dry summers entirely predictable and the inevitability of fires commencing though lightning and human causes. So why, you might ask, was there three decades of almost no large fires in the northern Jarrah forest from the 1970's to the late 1990's?

During this time a large bushfire in the northern Jarrah forest was considered by fire professionals to be one that reached over 1,000 hectares. The Driver Road fire of 1988, which burnt in almost the same place as the Waroona fire started in Lane Poole Reserve this year, reached 1,500 hectares. At that time the Driver Road fire was one of the largest fires since the Dwellingup Fire in 1961, when over 100,000 hectares burnt. Bushfire suppression during this period was carried out entirely by ground crews. The assistance of water bombing aircraft was not available.

Since the 1990's there has been an alarming decline in the amount of hazard reduction burning in the forest and in particular both crown and private land in and around townsites.

From the early 2000's large uncontrollable wildfires, burning in heavy fuels have become a regular occurrence in the northern Jarrah forest and adjoining areas including:

- Mt Cooke fire of 2002 – over 40,000 hectares
- Perth Hills fire of 2005 – over 40,000 hectares
- Dwellingup fire of 2007 – over 10,000 hectares
- Willowdale fire of 2007 – over 10,000 hectares
- Hotham fire of 2013 – over 50,000 hectares.

The trend of large fires occurring more frequently is evident even though more resources including an increasing number of water bombing aircraft are employed.

It is worth casting our minds back to the Royal Commission that followed the Dwellingup fire. The findings included a recommendation to improve *pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation*, or words' to that effect recognising that prior to the Dwellingup fire, the hazard reduction burning program (hand burning) was insufficient to make the task of controlling the inevitable wild fires much easier.

At Yarloop in January this year, fire crews were faced with the enormously difficult task of suppressing fires in heavy fuel loads with a head fire bearing down on the tinder dry town. Roadside vegetation and crown land, unburnt for 20 or more years, vacant town site land with dry grass, weeds and leaf litter unaltered by any form of bushfire

mitigation in the preceding spring provided the perfect scenario for a disastrous result when the fire front hit the town. The tragedy of this situation is that as preventable as it was, the same situation exists in Jarrahdale, Dwellingup, Greenbushes, Margaret River and almost every town and settlement in between. The lack of bushfire prevention and mitigation makes a repeat of the Yarloop tragedy almost inevitable.

There is however one outstanding example of a community taking bushfire prevention and mitigation seriously and resisting all of the negative pressures to wind down their activities. This is the town site of Allanson.

In many ways Allanson is similar to Yarloop being a semi-rural community with retired and lifestyle residents surrounded by farms, forests and road reserves. Yarloop and surrounding farms were ill prepared for fire, with forests and crown land containing heavy fuel loads, its road reserves were long unburnt and assets were generally vulnerable and not defensible. In contrast, the Allanson community has recognised the situation and have developed a plan to address bushfire risk. The town has communicated and implemented a community protection plan based on bushfire prevention that includes a foundation of hazard reduction burning.

The one exception in Yarloop where a facility was well-prepared is the local Primary School. Despite being located in the middle of town, surrounded by homes and the historic Yarloop Workshops that were destroyed, the Primary School remains standing after the fire. Although unattended as the fire passed and consumed the neighbouring buildings, the school survived the inferno. This was due to the Fire Protection Plan developed by a local fire expert which was diligently implemented by the Yarloop Primary School Principal. Of course, the plan included fuel reduction and separation of buildings from vegetation. Had such a plan been developed and implemented for the entire Yarloop town site, so much of the devastation of January 2016 would have likely been prevented.

Fire can be devastating at the wrong time, in the wrong place and at the wrong intensity. It can also be a very useful tool for managers who seek to reduce bushfire risk. Past history of limiting large fires through hazard reduction burning is testimony to this fact. The more recent history of reduced hazard reduction burning coincides with increased fire size and frequency.

The use of fire as a tool needs to be re-introduced into modern management as it was following the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Dwellingup fires of 1961. Following the 1961 fires, the Forest Department, where I worked as a forester, embarked on a revised program of using controlled fire as a means of reducing bushfire risk. This included developing aerial ignition techniques which are now widely used across Australia. The success of the broad scale aerial burn program reduced the risk of large fires occurring in the northern Jarrah forest as can be seen from the lack of large scale fires from the 1970's to the late 1990's.

The Cyclone Alby fires of April 1978 are an excellent example of the value of fuel reduction in mitigating bushfire risk. In this incident approximately 90 fires started which were driven by winds exceeding 120 km per hour. Fuels in the forest and farmlands were still extremely dry. The extent of fires was beyond the initial capacity of firefighting crews to handle. Top priority had to be the protection of life and property. Hence most fires were left to burn as they were in light fuels as a result of hazard reduction burning in the previous four years.

In some cases it was several days before suppression action could be taken. This was only made possible by the large strategic areas of fuel reduction in the forest. Several towns were under direct threat during the critical stage. There can be no doubt that loss of life and property damage would have been high had it not been for broad area hazard reduction.

Unfortunately, pressure from environmental groups, public opinion, resulting policy changes and shifting resources has since led to a decline in fuel reduction particularly around town sites. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this decline.

Firstly, in regard to Yarloop, there was almost no fuel reduction on private land within the town site. In the 1970s it was commonplace for volunteer bushfire brigades to burn vacant land on behalf of absentee owners in return for funds which were directed into brigade budgets. Change of policy has led to the cessation of this practice. Vacant land within town sites contain heavy fuel load whilst complying with local laws that require a narrow mineral earth perimeter firebreak which of course is completely ineffective in the event of a high intensity bushfire.

Secondly, road reserves in rural south west Western Australia were traditionally burnt at regular, frequent intervals by adjacent landowners as a means of reducing bushfire risk. The threat of prosecution by local authorities has led to the cessation of this once widespread practice with no effective bushfire risk reduction activity taking its place.

Thirdly, local government is responsible for Shire land which, as was evident in Yarloop, is not included in any systematic fuel reduction program. Local governments are generally underfunded for the broad range of activities for which they are responsible leading to bushfire risk reduction being inadequately addressed. The only course of action left to local government is to be well prepared for bushfire response. When a fire of similar intensity to that of January 2016 occurs, response mechanisms are found to be hopelessly inadequate; unless, like in Allanson, appropriate bushfire prevention has been taken well beforehand. Hazard reduction burning of small areas in and around townsites provides an ideal training ground for volunteer fire crews.

The situation I have described is not intended to convey criticism of those who are charged with the responsibility of protecting communities from fire and the many volunteers who give time and effort towards this endeavour. On the contrary I am impressed with the efforts many provide however it is saddening to see that this effort is largely wasted when the inevitable ignition of fire occurs under severe weather conditions. It is the legislative and policy settings that must change to enable south

west Western Australian communities to be protectable in the event of bushfire. The current arrangements are arguably workable; however the complete failure of these arrangements to prevent the Yarloop tragedy shows that the current system is not working.

In Western Australia's parks and reserves there is a regular program of risk assessment and bushfire risk reduction through a range of means including a solid base of hazard reduction burning. The same is required for those areas of farmland, road reserves, private land and local government land if the lessons from the Waroona fires and others are to be learned.

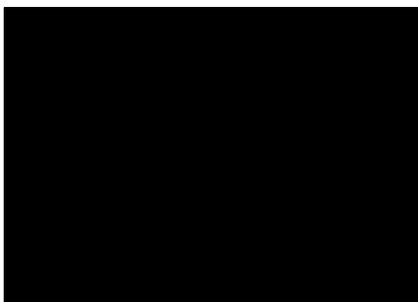
One way of achieving this would be to create a rural fire authority that combined all of the non-metropolitan resources of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services with Local Government rural fire resources. This authority would need to be mandated to replicate the Department of Parks and Wildlife's objectives in bushfire risk reduction so as to be able to address the widespread and huge issues of bushfire risk facing rural communities.

It is only through this rather fundamental return to fuel reduction that Western Australia can possibly avoid numerous repeats of the situation that occurred in Yarloop in January 2016.

I sincerely hope you are able to incorporate my comments into the Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry recommendations.

I am available to meet with you if you think this would be worthwhile.

Yours faithfully



Contact Phone: [Redacted]

## The response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire

- (a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities;  
The Hamel Eco Precinct owned and managed by DPAW has a huge fuel load and burden and nothing has been done in this area despite an obvious need and some consultation. No back burning has occurred for many years  
Since the shire share rangers with shire of murray I think there has been an improvement with fire preparation – fire break control and infringement.
- (b) The effectiveness of emergency management plans and procedures;  
The Incident Controller was excellent and kept us as well informed as possible.  
The Shire of Waroona appear to have learnt little after the 2015 fires as far as Community meeting and management. Held at the Rec centre – no water available on the first days with pregnant women, elderly and young children in attendance as well as farmers and residents caught in fire areas. No PA system set up making it very hard to hear. The Shire owns a battery powered PA system and communication is vital at this time.
- (c) The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire;  
No active fire fighting unless it was a residence. Some of the fire could have been stopped well before it reached some farmers sheds. Red Truck units stood and “watched” they did not put one bit of water on fires to assist in farmers gaining better access to prevent further damage. Trucks left residents to fight fires with small tenders and only returned once the owners had to flee for their lives – to the detriment of their house.
- (d) The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance;  
Amazing. Coordination of so many agencies must be difficult. Shame that they turned down interstate support with the large plane.- real shame. I don't know why you would say no.
- (e) Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency services organisations and the community;
- (f) The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors;  
Poor meeting coordination – Shire were telling people that there were no meetings whilst at the rec centre there were meetings on. No PA used. People from out of town were not advised of facilities available. People need to be told to turn mobile phones off whilst in the meeting or at least on silent.  
Agencies did not set them up well for people to be able to approach them afterwards  
Text messages are a bit delayed.
- (g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire:  
Last year 2015 people were dropped off water and contacted after the fires this year they had very little contact
- (i) Evacuation procedures
  - (ii) Back roads stayed open allowing people to come and go initially.
  - (iii) People went to park on the highway in the truck bay safely to get some sleep and were told to move along at midnight.
  - (iv)
- (ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire  
Updates on the DFES website are very slow as was the radio. Facebook page with information would be good.
- (iii) Provision of welfare support

Recovery committee was not set up until Monday after the fires. Too long. Some people need to start part of the recovery from the minute it is happening. There are always people not leaving their homes.

Coordination of this is always difficult with a mass influx of supplies – some unnecessary. Not enough water provided to families with out drinking water.

- (v) Management of people seeking to return to their properties, and  
This is disappointing – people are still not allowed to return to their homes in Yarloop that are standing and unaffected  
Power units were placed in cookernup, Waroona preston beach but still Yarloop has no power for those who stay.

(h) Livestock and companion animal management and welfare issues.

Waroona vet clinic were awesome – animal management through Landcare? Dept Ag? Was great.

## **2. Lessons learned from previous bushfire emergencies**

(a) The extent to which the findings and recommendations of the following Western Australian bushfire reviews undertaken since 2011 have been implemented: 2

All of the recommendations that were put forward to the Shire of Waroona have not been acted on in the last 12 months.

Department of Children Services were contacted by Community Development at the Shire and never returned any contact.

Need to keep a supply of bottled water for incidence like this.

Too many cooks all wanting the power jobs in the recovery and not using the networks for a collaborative effect.

Use your local resources and knowledge – don't ignore it – next time they won't offer.

Positives: Volunteer Fire Brigades and local residents and farmers were responsible for a great effort and active fire fighting.

It would be beneficial for you to talk to this ederly farmer with years of experience and knowledge of fires having worked for CALM.



From:- [REDACTED]

Phone:- [REDACTED]

Email:- [REDACTED]

Location:- [REDACTED]

Postal:- [REDACTED]

22 February 2016

Waroona Bushfire Special inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH W.A. 6005

Attention:- Mr Euan Ferguson

WaroonaInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au

**RE: Waroona Bushfire Special inquiry**

My name is [REDACTED], and I am located on [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] My property was completely burnt starting at about 7.30pm  
on the 7 January 2016. With some preparedness we chose to stay and defend our properties.

I would like to raise a couple of separate issues both of which relate to the Waroona Fire management.

First is the fire front passing through my property more than one hour before that fire front subsequently wiped out Yarloop, with nobody in the fire control system knowing about this front when it was easily anticipated from the original fire and a weather map.

Second is the monitoring of the fire control radio frequencies. Primarily to keep up dated on the fire movement as commercial radio information is not accurate or up to date enough for people defending their own properties. While monitoring the fire controllers, in my opinion there seems to be a lack of skill in a number of areas of these controllers. Particularly in using a two way radio.

On the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> January I was already aware from neighbors, of the fire behind Waroona Lane pool area. Although it was North of me and burning to the West and should not have been a threat I was concerned.

Looking at the weather map a little later on the day I could see a trough down the coast which was deepening. This deepening trough would bring the predominantly Easterly wind around to a North Easterly. From this I could see that the fire from the original fire ground would be heading directly toward us later in the day. Not hard to predict.

Although the power went off at 7.30am or so we were able to prepare for the pending fire using our own installed generator. We pumped water all day wetting down.

I listened to the fire control radio frequency all day to help track the fire location. No mention was made of the fire in our area. All fire fighting efforts were being moved out towards the coast all day.

Late afternoon I drove out our drive onto Scarp then Hoffman Road turning East. I drove up to the fire front and measured it back to our property. There were no fire units in the area that I saw nor heard on the radio.

I should point out that this is the fire front that I believe traveled down the hill to the West of me and through Yarloop.

At about 6.30pm I decided to ring 000 from number [REDACTED] ask for fire and after a short time was connected to a fire controller. I asked if she was in Waroona and she said she was in Perth. After some direction onto a map with her I was able to indicate that the fire front was 2km East of my property and on the South side of Hoffman Road. I estimated it would be at my place in the hour. The fire controller announced she was not aware of a fire front in that location. Shortly after my call we had several drops from heli attack before they had to leave pending last light. Sadly although it was nice to see them it had little effect on the inferno.

It could be seen from a weather map early in the day of the 7<sup>th</sup> January, that Yarloop would be under direct threat from the near the original ignition point of the fire. This fire being in state forest had little or no attendance all day. We certainly had no support from fire units at our place.

I am able to say, that my neighbors and myself were able to successfully defend and save all our main assets on three adjoining properties.

A few key points:-

- No one seemed to bother predicting the direction flow of the original fire.
- All fire fighting effort ran off to the West. Nothing addressing the original fire location.
- Fire control had inadequate knowledge of the fire location.
- No effort was made to control the fire prior to it reaching Yarloop or our place.
- No one in our location received any SMS notification relating to the fire.
- People in Yarloop and us lost power very early on the day. Most would not have had battery radios to monitor ABC for warnings.
- ABC radio warnings referenced to the Waroona Fire. This is not Yarloop and generally would not be of concern to a person in Yarloop.

To the second issue which is really my opinion. I am a radio communications educator and listening to the fire controllers on the twoway radio made me cringe at times. Fire controllers seem to have difficulty understanding calls from fire crews in the field yet they are in the air-conditioned office, often asking for repeats, Fire controllers seem to ask fire crews for information when they are busy and seem to have no understanding of the actual work loading in the field. Fire controllers don't use structured standard phraseology or standard phonetics when transferring information and are poor twoway radio operators. These deficiencies make communicating slow and cumbersome.

Fire crews are often asking for information or direction and in many cases cannot get a quick timely reply. A lot of time they have to repeat the call to even get a response. Fire controllers are not paying attention they also have no local knowledge and are not able to work with local datum's for positioning reference.

A major portion of radio traffic time is spent asking, where are you? I can't believe that a little more technology is not in place to put every fire unit on a map on a computer screen at fire control. Even mobile phone apps will do this while the mobile network is up but something more reliable could be in place.

A few notes on the second point:-

- Fire controllers need some prior experience on the fire ground.
- Training required for radio operating procedures etc.
- Practice listening to radio traffic so they can understand properly.
- Be responsive to crews in the field even if they just acknowledge a call and say standby.
- Some operators have extremely strong accents. It's not their fault but it makes communications difficult in adverse conditions.
- Let fire fighters with local knowledge be the fire controllers with the Perth staff being support only for them.
- Its not rocket science these days to get GPS information sent over radio to position vehicles on a computer map.

I appreciate being able to put in a submission and should there be any queries I am happy to be contacted. I cannot say the exact time of my 000 call as my phone was destroyed during the fire fighting and the log is lost. After hearing from locals some of the other storey's relating to the paid fire crews and lack of performance I consider my storey insignificant.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## CLEGG Emma

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 1 March 2016 7:27 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** TRIM: yarloop fire

**Categories:** Blue Category

re fire inquiry-

please explain/investigate why as a farmer i was not allowed to drive 20m past a road block to get to my dairy after explaining i live/work there.

please explain/investigate why fireys were not allowed to put out a fire in front of them until an idiot in an office said it was ok.

please explain/investigate why fesa refused to put out the fire before it got to yarloop using the excuse that it was a budget saving measure not to water bomb/send fireys to put it out.

please explain/investigate why an alumina refinery possibly got priority treatment over the town of yarloop for fesa fire fighting gear.

please explain/investigate why the same alumina refinery possibly got special treatment to move personal in/out of exclusion zone.

please explain/investigate why a fire truck full of water and personal was not allowed to put out a farm/ paddock fire.

please explain/investigate why privately owned heavy earth moving gear that was free of charge and supplied with a driver that knows the area was refused entry and told to leave while fesa employed out of town contractors.

so many more questions.....

one question has to be answered, why did fesa let the town of yarloop burn to the ground.

[REDACTED] yarloop.

## Waroona Bushfire 2016



### Regard - evacuation procedures

Background I live near Mandurah and my mother lives at Brunswick. She is 89 years old with limited mobility. She lives just east of town on a small property at the foot of the hills. She has no transport. Her house and property would be considered high risk.

During the fires both the Forrest and South West Hwys were closed. For me to pick her up would involve a 6-8 hr drive around Collie etc. She would not leave until an evacuation order would be in place. If or when I could get around to the area and if the fire had been upgraded I believe road blocks would be in place and I still would not be allowed in .

Problem I was trying to put my mother's name, address and situation on file early, so if or when the fire was upgraded for her area (Brunswick), an agency would know and be able to evacuate her safely. I did not want to leave registering her situation until the fire warning stage of evacuation was advised. At this time there may be a risk of communications failing or other things changing.

Friends etc of hers in the area would have their own problems to deal with, it is not their responsibility and they also may not be allowed into the area with roadblocks in place.

On trying to find if and where a registry for this type of situation was, I got the run around. I tried the DFS helpline and evacuation centre lines (who only deal with the evacuees). I then tried Australind Police and was diverted to Bunbury Police. They did take her details but I felt it was not an official register of people requiring assistance to evacuate should the need arise.

Suggestion An agency (Police, Fire, Family and Child Protection or other etc ) coordinate an advertised registry for this type or similar situation.

Thanking you



## Waroona Inquiry

My name is [REDACTED] I am currently the 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant of the Mount Helena Voluntary Bush Fire Brigade. I have 15 years of bushfire and structural firefighting experience with 5 years being in the NSWRF (Loftus) and 10 years in WA. I have run many incidents as Incident Controller, two incidents as Divisional Commander, and many times I have held the role of Sector Commander and ground controller. I also have 15 years in the aviation industry and currently a licenced aircraft maintenance engineer.

The Waroona complex of fires was a fire not been seen for many years in WA. The fire season of 2015/16 has been interesting in the way the fire has acted and intensity in the many incidents that I have attended to date.

When the fire kicked off on the 6<sup>th</sup> Jan I watched it grow from landgates myfirewatch website along with taking an interest in the spot weather forecast. From the moment that it started I thought to myself that we would get called to go down and assist like we did in Jan 2015. As I was working the next day I thought no doubt we would get called at some stupid hour of the morning like most out of area incidents. However this was not the case.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> Jan I attended work and I was tasked to be in the tool crib (I currently work at Perth domestic airport for Qantas as an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer mechanical) I could see the plume of smoke rise once the day started. I was shocked to have had no call outs for the Waroona fire. I took a few photos (Which I have since deleted) of the fire growing from the airport and sent it to the chief.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> Jan I received a phone call from the temporary Chief BFCO [REDACTED] to see of crew availability. (1111hrs)

At 1141 I made contact with [REDACTED] again to confirm crews and an update on the situation. I also informed him from what I could see at Perth airport and that only experienced crews should attend this incident. At 1146 I called the pager service and requested crew members for possible deployment to Waroona.

1433hrs I rang Gary again to inform him that I have crews available including BA members for a night shift deployment. As we had time on our side I told the guys on the crew to get some rest before driving down as it will be a busy night. I was very aware of fatigue management right away.

At 1618hrs information from the Captain [REDACTED] was that the crew was not required (From the MOC). We discussed that this was not the best decision however people in the ivory tower know best and clearly holding us all back for whatever reason. It is very frustrating to organise crews for an ongoing incident to be stood down after many hours.

During the previous day and on the 8<sup>th</sup> I had a lot of guys ask me questions in regards to the fire at work. I said with the current ROS and weather conditions it will reach the ocean and also head south. I also said to the guys that it would probably take out Yarloop and Harvey. I also noticed that the fire behaviour and the way that WA works is that they will not be able to stop this fire anytime soon until the weather changes.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> Jan Mt Helena VFB sent down 3 members as part of a composite strike team for a 3 day deployment. The members all reported that it was a very poorly run incident and that they were not being fed, total confusion on the fire ground, poor comms, no accommodation the list continued on.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of Jan Mt Helena VFB sent down our 3.4 at a request from MOC that we were required urgently down there. We assembled at our station for an immediate deployment down to Waroona only to be told that we are going down normal road. We knew that the fire had jumped containment lines at that point and they were calling in resources. One of the members who had returned from his 3 day deployment refused to go down again due to how poor it had been run.

We left our station for Darlington and then Waroona. The shire of Mundaring team consisted of Mt Helena 3.4U and Light Tanker with me being OIC and the Darlington LT.

We arrived to what I describe as a mess. An incident that has been run for such a long time you have had the time to put AIIMS into place, have your staffing levels correct along with everything else that goes on within the IMT/Incident.

I have scanned and copied in my personal incident diary for my deployment at Waroona at the bottom of this document.

## **Issues that we had**

DFES MOC/SOC – Can't get their act together with information. This season we have had so many conflicting reports from the MOC to the point where we have rang the IC to confirm if they need crews or not.

Weather – The forecast was only for 18hrs, there was no 4 day or longer forecasts arranged until late in the incident.

Comms – The comms plan when I arrived was poor and not thought out before we arrived. Our divisional commander was poorly organised and had no real idea.

Crew requirements – Made and then stood down much to their frustration. As volunteers we have to arrange our work, appointments etc.

Food – On our deployment we got fed at the ICP and then I think it was around 1am, which consisted of cold sausages. Very poorly organised 6 days on from the incident starting.

Fatigue management – This is an area which needs addressing in a very serious capacity. As volunteers we are not taken seriously when we mention it to the IMT or DIV COM etc

AIIMS/IMT as much as it is scalable and we learn that in a major incident that grows exponentially it can't grow at the same rate. This is where the breakdown in communication occurs and errors get made very frequently. This is an issue Australia wide no doubt world wide.

Maps – This is something that needs addressing as many accounts of the maps were very old and in the case of when I arrived it was 4 days old. There is no excuse for that. We have technology now so why don't we have access to FES MAPS (read only) so there can be an update on what is happening (ie Sector/divisional boundry)

Strategy – We are not happy that we were sent to Yarloop for no strategic reasons at all and have been exposed to asbestos. It was extremely windy and the task we had of mopping up in the town site when we were there was not warranted. We did not know at the time of the possible exposure and we should not have been subjected to the area of concern. We attend fires as volunteers in good faith and it is starting to become a bit of a joke. We feel that we are essentially being used as cannon fodder at times.

Strategy - This is a very frustrating topic as to why WA IC's and ops officers do what they do. We know the weather is going to change so why keep doing what we have traditionally done and attempt to knock out the head fire or try and pinch it off? This is where WA needs to start using retardant more often and or back burning.

Retardant in the SW forest will not stop a fire especially a very intense fire, however it can reduce the ROS of that fire. In the recent Myalup/Harvey/Uduc incident I witnessed a direct attack on a house and bushland with retardant which saved the house (I have photos) That night I ended up speaking to the air ops guy that made that decision and I said well done because you saved that house.

Our strategy and tactics used in firefighting especially in the Jarrah forest needs to be looked at and new techniques need to be thought of. We have a unique bushland in comparison to the rest of the country and we need to adapt. The CSIRO did a lot of research with Project Vesta and it is a very worthwhile project that has some great benefits for IC's and ops officers to have that background knowledge.

Volunteers – There was a great effort and requirement to make composite crews and also go onto different vehicles with no training. This is clearly a new thing that WA is going with and has great merits, however there needs to be more training on the vehicles for situations like this. Volunteers also feel that they are being used and abused by having to work 12+hr shifts plus driving to and from home and their paid counterparts are on the fireground for 6hours and get taxis.

Use of LAT/VLAT aircraft need to be used in WA as part of the NAFC, and the calls need to be made sooner. I have always had drummed into me to call your resources now and not later as it is easier to turn them around to then request them and wait. There is always cost involved however the destruction that we have seen would have outweighed the cost of the aircraft.

Perth airport has potential to house the VLAT/LAT aircraft along with a refilling area. The airport fire service is currently located to the North of the airport. Taxiway W could be used as a potential spot for the aircraft to refill and lines run from the fire station. The disruption to the airport would be minimal due to the fact of sustained wind direction while the aircraft fill up.

Issues with DFES and P&W –

There have been many issues over the years and this year it appears to be worse when we attend fires, more so in DFES. I and other volunteers have discussed about this fire season in detail to date and we have all come to a conclusion it appears that DFES IC's are all chest beating and who can run this or that incident. It has added a very different dynamic to large incidents. Typically we arrive at a fire and it is the usual of hurry up and wait. This season it is arrive and you're on this sector and off you go and ends up with total confusion on the fireground. While being deployed is welcomed, it

does create a lot of extra work on the fireground. This including T-Cards, ICV battle boards etc. To date no one has a problem from the sector commander down to the fire crews. The issues are everything above the sector commander.

Current fuel loadings and burning –

I have noticed that in recent years that our window of opportunity is greatly reducing for carrying out burning. From a regulation view that when the fire season ends we go into restricted burning. This is causing us issues due to the fact that we are typically not getting the rain needed to carry out safe burning. I saw in last years burning season with DPaW that they were just torching the bush to the point where it is a “controlled” wildfire. This is due to the fact that they have a target to reach. DPaW also typically burn for longer periods than what volunteers can. (Along with Local governments)

I am more than happy to discuss this more, and also be interviewed/questioned.

Regards,

[Redacted]

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant

Mt Helena VBFB

[Redacted]

[Redacted]



PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 13/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SCOTT	SERVICE No: 13216
1830			MT HELENA V8FB3 WERE CALLED TO WAROONA	
			2100 HRS ARRIVED. CREW LT MIKE ALEXANDER, PAUL COSTALL	
			MEE 2100, MOP OSOL(W) OS22(26) 3,4 BRENDEN SCOTT, NIK PARRY	
			STEVE COLEMAN, AIMEE DOBSON	
			JORDON BLAIN	
			UPON ARRIVAL WE WERE ASSIGNED WAROONA DIVISION. WE HAD A	
			BRIEF APPROX 45 MINS AFTER OUR ARRIVAL IN THE WAROONA FIRE STATION.	
			THE DIV COM WAS A S/O WHO NEVER INTRODUCED HIMSELF, MAPS WERE	
			PRINTED ON THE 9" (4 DAYS OLD) AND THE BRIEF WAS VERY POOR.	
			THE DIVISION WAS BEING RUN AS 1 SECTOR. I ASKED HOW BIG IT WAS	
			AND I RECOMMENDED THAT IT BE SPLIT INTO 2 SECTORS. IT WAS	
			DECIDED TO SPLIT THE DIVISION INTO 2 SECTORS - NOVEMBER - WEST OF	
			THE HV LINES, ZULU EAST OF THE HV POWER LINES. WE WERE TOLD	
			THAT YARLOOP WAS A NO GO ZONE DUE TO RESIDENTS BEING THERE	
			AND THEY DESIRED FIRE PERSONAL AROUND THE TOWN. WE WERE THEN TOLD	
			TO LEAVE THE BRIEF SO THE S/C AND DN COM COULD MAKE A	
			BRIEF. A CALL CAME OVER THE RADIO THAT THERE WAS A HOP OVER.	
			THE JANDAKOT LIGHT TANKERS WENT DOWN TO THE HOP OVER. WE THEN	
			HAD TO WAIT APPROX 20 MINS FOR A 2ND BRIEF TO OCCUR DURING THE BRIEF	
			THE SECTOR CHANNELS WERE ASSIGNED. QUESTIONS WERE ASKED ABOUT THE	
			BRIDGE THAT WAS DOWN. ALSO A ROUTE WHICH WAS APPROPRIATE TO	

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PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 13/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SCOTT	SERVICE No: 13216
			TRAVEL TO YARLOOP, THE DN COM HAD NO IDEA AND COULD NOT	
			ANSWER US. WATER POINTS, HE COULD NOT TELL US EITHER. WE WERE	
			ASSIGNED SECTOR ZULU AND OUR S/C WAS BIRBOON LT. SOON AFTER WE	
			HAD SORTED OUT OUR SECTOR CHANNEL WE WERE TOLD TO RESPOND TO	
			YARLOOP TO THE OLD TIMBER MILL AS THERE WAS LOGS GIVING OFF A LOT	
			OF EMBERS AND IT WAS ALSO REPORTED THAT THE EMBERS WERE GOING INTO	
			UNBURNT GROUND. WE MADE OUR WAY FROM THE FCP TO YARLOOP. THERE	
			WERE SIGNS UP DIVERTING TRAFFIC AROUND THE DESTROYED BRIDGE.	
			I CALLED UP OUR LT TO INFORM THEM AS OUR S/C WAS NOT	
			YET ON HIS WAY. AS THE MAPS WERE POOR I HAD TO USE MY PHONE	
			AND GOOGLE MAPS. ON ARRIVAL THERE WAS WAROONA LT AND ANOTHER LT	
			THAT WAS AT THE OLD MILL. WE MADE ENTRY AFTER WAROONA LT CAME TO	
			THE GATE AND TOLD US HOW TO GET IN. I MADE THE DECISION TO CARRY OUT	
			A RECON OF THE MILL FIRST BEFORE ASSESSING THE WOOD PILES. ALL OF	
			THE STRUCTURES APART FROM 1 ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE MILL WAS DESTROYED.	
			THERE WAS MANY VEHICLES THAT WERE STILL OK BUT NOT UNDER ANY	
			THREAT. WE EXTINGUISHED 1 JARDAH TREE ON THE BOUNDARY AS IT HAD	
			POTENTIAL TO FALL ONTO THE UNDAMAGED STRUCTURES. WE THEN MOVED THE	
			TRUCK TO THE 1 <sup>st</sup> PILE OF WOOD. I ASSESSED THE PILE AND USED A LINE OF	
			60mm AND 6% FOAM ONTO THE PILE. I THEN USED OUR FLIR TO ASSESS	
			THE PILE. THERE WAS NO WAT OF FULLY EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE WITH HOSES	

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01/16



PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 13/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SLOTT	SERVICE No: 132116

				<p>WE RAN OUT OF WATER SO WE WENT UP TO THE WATER POINT JOHNSON RD. BRICKMAN. WE WERE TASKED BY THE S/C TO RETURN TO THE MILL TO PUT OUT A SMALL PILE NEXT TO ONE OF THE BURNT OUT STRUCTURE. ONCE WE HAD EXTINGUISHED THE PILE I CALLED UP THE S/C TO INFORM HIM OF THE SITUATION. HE THEN REQUESTED THAT WE RESPOND TO A HOP OVER AT A FARM ON JOHNSON RD. WE ARRIVED TO A VERY SMALL GRASS FIRE WHICH WE PUT OUT PROMPTLY. ONCE WE RAN OUT OF WATER WE FILLED UP AND WERE THEN TASKED TO ANOTHER HOP OVER WHICH WAS THE GOLF COURSE AT WAROONA. WE NEARLY MADE IT HOWEVER WE WERE STOOD DOWN AS DPAN WERE LOOKING AFTER THE GOLF COURSE FIRE. THE S/C THEN TASKED US TO CARRY OUT A PATROL OF THE SOUTHERN EDGE OF OUR SECTOR. WE DROVE DOWN TO THE EDGE ON SOUTHWEST HWY, THEN DOWN CLIFTON RD. WE THEN CAME ACROSS A BRIDGE THAT WAS DAMAGED (CLIFTON RD X HONEYBUSH RD) WE GOT OUT AND ASSESSED THE BRIDGE AS THERE WAS STAL BURNING TIMBER I DECIDED IT WAS TOO DANGEROUS TO ATTEMPT TO EXTINGUISH AND WE THEN TURNED AROUND. WE DROVE AROUND THE TOWN SITE TO SEE IF THERE WAS ANY HOT SPOTS. WE DID NOT FIND ANY HOT SPOTS THROUGH THE TOWN. THE S/C CALLED UP ON THE RADIO AND REQUESTED THAT WE PICK UP FOR SOME REFRESHMENTS THEY REFRESHMENTS WAS 2 SAUSAGES (COLD) IN GRavy AND CAKE. FOR AN INCIDENT ON DAY 6 IT WAS AVERAGE TO HAVE A MEAL OF THAT SIZE.</p>
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DFES  
Department of Fire and  
Emergency Services

PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

PAGE: 38854

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 13/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SCOTT	SERVICE No: 132116
0300			<p>WHILE HAVING REFRESHMENTS WE GOT A CALL TO HEAD DOWN TO THE POLICE CHECK POINT (CHIFTON X SW HWY) THE S/C AND I HAD A LOOK AT THE GLOWING LOGS/TREES IN THE DISTANCE. I ALSO HAD OUR FLIR/TIC OUT AND HAD A LOOK. I TOLD THE S/C THAT I DID NOT WANT TO GO IN THERE AS THERE WAS NO NEED TO. MY REASONING WAS TREES AND IT WAS WELL WITHIN BURNT GROUND. HE THEN TOLD ME EITHER TO GO PUT IT OUT OR GO BACK TO THE MILL. I TOLD HIM BOTH ARE POINTLESS. HE THEN SAID NOTHING AND LEFT. HE PULLED UP A MAP FOR A TRACK TO ACCESS THE HOT SPOTS BEFORE HE LEFT ON HIS PHONE (GOOGLE MAPS SATELLITE VIEW). I JUMPED BACK INTO OUR TRUCK AND TOLD THE GUYS THE TWO OPTIONS WE ELECTED TO GO FOR A DRIVE TO FIND THE HOT SPOTS TO ESSENTIALLY WASTE TIME. WE WENT INTO A HUGE Paddock TO FIND THE HOT SPOTS REPORTED BY THE POLICE. THEY WERE ALL WITHIN THE BURNT GROUND AND POSED NO THREAT. I CALLED UP THE S/C AND INFORMED HIM OF OUR FIND. WE THEN SAID WE WOULD DO ANOTHER PATROL THROUGH THE TOWN TO THE MILL WE DROVE DOWN CHIFTON RD AND FOUND 2 HOTSPOTS. I ELECTED TO PUT THESE OUT AS IT HAD POTENTIAL TO DAMAGE THE ROAD IF THE ROOT KEPT ON BURNING UNDER THE ROAD. WE THEN DROVE THROUGH THE TOWN TO THE MILL. I PARKED THE 34 NEXT TO THE LARGE PILE OF WOOD ON FIRE</p>	

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Department of Fire and  
Emergency Services

PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

PAGE: 38855

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 13/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SCOTT	SERVICE No: 132116
0300			<p>I USED THE 30MM LINE REEL HOSE AND 6% FOAM TO TRY AND EXTINGUISH THE PILE OF WOOD. IT WAS VERY WINDY WITH A HUGE AMOUNT OF DUST, SMOKE AND EMBERS BLOWING AROUND. IT WAS A DIFFICULT TASK WE MANAGED TO DAMPEN DOWN A FAIR AMOUNT OF THE PILE, HOWEVER WITHOUT MACHINERY IT WAS A POINTLESS TASK, A WASTE OF WATER AND A VALUABLE RESOURCE. WE RAN OUT OF WATER, SO WE MOVED TOWARDS THE STRUCTURES AND USED OUR REMAINING WATER TO PUT OUT SOME WOOD BURNING IN THE GROUND (SAFETY REASON) WE THEN LEFT TO THE WATER POINT. UPON REACHING THE WATER POINT THE S/C WAS THERE AND I TOLD HIM THAT WE ARE STANDING DOWN AND RETURNING TO THE CONTROL POINT WITH OUR WARM TANKER (0440) HE SAID THANKS AND SEE YOU NEXT FIRE. THE 34 AND LIGHT TANKER RETURNED TO WAROONA TO COLLECT OUR T-CARDS ON OUR ARRIVAL AROUND 0510 <del>1010</del> WE FILLED UP WITH FUEL &amp; REPLENISHED OUR FOAM. WE THEN PARKED ON THE OVAL AND I TOLD THE GUYS TO GO GET SOME BREAKFAST WHILE I GO GET OUR T-CARDS. I PICKED UP THE 1<sup>st</sup> T-CARD AND THEN MADE MY WAY TO THE WAROONA FIRE STATION. I FOLLOWED THE DEPUTY OPS OFFICER ONLY TO FIND THE REAR ALL LOCKED UP. HE WALKED AROUND THE FRONT TO FIND THE DIV COM ASLEEP IN A CAR. I WALKED INSIDE TO SEE THE RADIO OPERATOR ASLEEP TO AND A NSW RFS PERSON WALKING AROUND. I PULLED MY</p>	
0440			<p>THE S/C WAS THERE AND I TOLD HIM THAT WE ARE STANDING DOWN AND RETURNING TO THE CONTROL POINT WITH OUR WARM TANKER (0440) HE SAID THANKS AND SEE YOU NEXT FIRE. THE 34 AND LIGHT TANKER RETURNED TO WAROONA TO COLLECT OUR T-CARDS ON OUR ARRIVAL AROUND 0510 <del>1010</del> WE FILLED UP WITH FUEL &amp; REPLENISHED OUR FOAM. WE THEN PARKED ON THE OVAL AND I TOLD THE GUYS TO GO GET SOME BREAKFAST WHILE I GO GET OUR T-CARDS. I PICKED UP THE 1<sup>st</sup> T-CARD AND THEN MADE MY WAY TO THE WAROONA FIRE STATION. I FOLLOWED THE DEPUTY OPS OFFICER ONLY TO FIND THE REAR ALL LOCKED UP. HE WALKED AROUND THE FRONT TO FIND THE DIV COM ASLEEP IN A CAR. I WALKED INSIDE TO SEE THE RADIO OPERATOR ASLEEP TO AND A NSW RFS PERSON WALKING AROUND. I PULLED MY</p>	

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Department of Fire and Emergency Services

## PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

PAGE: 38856

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 14/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SCOTT	SERVICE No: 132116
0500 / 0530			T-CARD FOR THE 34 AND WE HAD A CHAT ABOUT THEM OVER HERE AND MY EX BRIGADE HOUSTON. I THEN LEFT TO STILL SEE THE DV COM ASLEEP. AS THERE WAS NO FOOD WE LEFT FOR HOME I DROVE THE TRUCK TO THE MCDONALDS ON THE FWY. WHILE WE WERE ORDERING WE HAD A LOVELY COUPLE OFFER TO PAY FOR OUR BREAKFAST. I WAS SO TIRED (BEEN AWAKE FOR OVER 24 HRS) THAT IT TOOK A WHILE TO REGISTER. I SAID THANKS BUT IT IS OK. THE LADY SAID NO. I REALLY WANT TO PAY AS IT IS OUR WAY TO SAY THANKS. WE ACCEPTED. WE THEN LEFT WITH OUR BREAKY ARRIVING BACK AT THE STATION. I DID THE FIRE REPORT WHILE THE OTHER GUYS WASHED THE TRUCK AS IT WAS VERY DIRTY. I WENT HOME FOR SOME SLEEP. I WOKE UP AFTER 3 HOURS OF SLEEP. I HAD WASHED MY PPC AND <del>IT</del> THEN DROPPED IT OFF AT THE STATION. I THEN MESSAGED VIA SMS TO ALL THE GUYS WHO WENT OUT ON THE 34 AND LT TO WASH THEIR PPC AS I SAW ON FACEBOOK ABOUT ASBESTOS IN YARLOUP.	
1145				
0900	15/01/16		I SAW ON FACEBOOK THAT THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAD DONE SOME AIR READINGS AND THE LEVEL OF ASBESTOS WAS THE HIGHEST RECORDED. I RANG THE CHIEF AND ASKED IF IT WAS TRUE WHICH HE SAID YES. I THEN INFORMED HIM THAT WE WERE IN YARLOUP FOR NEAR THE WHOLE NIGHT. GARY INFORMED ME THAT DFES HAS ISSUED A CIRCULAR ABOUT THE ASBESTOS.	

White Copy - Incident Records

Pink Copy - Handover Briefing

Yellow Copy - Officer Copy

DFES  
Department of Fire and Emergency Services

## PERSONAL INCIDENT DIARY

PAGE: 38857

INCIDENT NAME: WAROONA			INCIDENT No. 323128	DATE: 15/01/16
TIME:	FROM:	TO:	NAME: BRENDEN SCOTT	SERVICE No: 132116
0900 - 1100			I HAD THE CIRCULAR EMAILED TO ME AND I FORWARDED IT ONTO THE MEMBERS WHO WERE AT THE FIRE. I ALSO EMAILED GARY THE NAMES OF THE PEOPLE IN ATTENDANCE. I RANG CAMERON (CAPTAIN) AND INFORMED HIM WHAT WAS GOING ON.	
1700			ACTING D.O. NORTH COASTAL MARK CASOTTI ARRANGED FOR ALL MEMBERS TO HAVE THEIR PPC BAGGED UP AND IT WILL BE PICKED UP AT 0900 ON SATURDAY 16 <sup>th</sup> JAN 2016 FOR DRY CLEANING WHEN TIME. I HAVE SOME SPARE TIME I WILL WRITE UP A INCIDENT REPORT.	
0800	16/01/16		THE BRIGADE CLEANED THE VEHICLES WEARING LEVEL 1 MASK ONLY. ACTING CHIEF GARY RANG 0948 17 JAN 16 TO INFORM ME THAT HE WAS PICKING UP THE BA HOODS AS THEY REQUIRE DRY CLEANING TOO.	

White Copy - Incident Records

Pink Copy - Handover Briefing

Yellow Copy - Officer Copy



To whom it may concern,

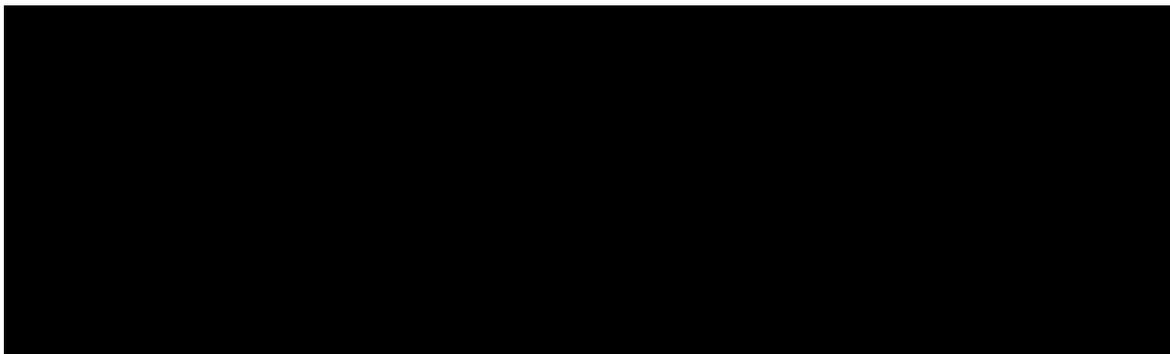
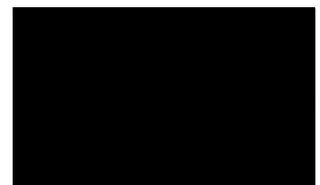
I am writing in regards to the recent events surrounding the Waroona Bushfire.

Firstly let us say that my family and I are most appreciative of the hero firefighters and everybody else involved in protecting our small town.

However we have major concerns in the way, we as locals were treated in respect to coming and going to our properties/homes on roads that were completely safe and not under any threat from fire.

A system needs to be implemented to allow movement of locals to travel to and from their properties to get vital equipment such as generators etc without being blocked from returning.

Kind regards



25/2/2016

WAROONA BUSHFIRE SPECIAL INQUIRY,  
LEVEL 6, DUMAS HOUSE,  
2 HADLOCK STREET,  
WEST PERTH W.A. 6005

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN  
DEAR SIR,

JUST A FEW SUBMISSIONS.

(1) MAY - JUNE - JULY - STATE WIDE CONTROLLED  
FIRE REDUCTION BURNS.  
LATER IN THE YEAR BURNS ARE TOO HOT.

(2) FARMERS & RURAL PROPERTIES.

(a) INSTALL FIRE BREAKS ON OUTSIDE OF  
BOUNDARY FENCES.

(b) BURN AROUND FARM HOUSE AND SHEDS  
BEFORE FIRE SEASON (NOV)

OR.

HAVE A GREEN BELT UNDER RITRICATION  
AROUND HOUSE.

AND OR

SPRAY AROUND SHEDS - CLEAN EARTH.

(c) HAVE A 50,000 LT CONCRETE WATER  
TANK WITH OWN GENERATOR AND FIRE FIGHTING  
UNIT AND CHECKED ONCE A WEEK DURING  
FIRE SEASON

PTO

25/2/2016

③ SHIRE RATES TO INCLUDE COMPULSORY INSURANCE FOR HOMES & SHEDS

TO SEE THE DESPERATE LOOK AND TEARS ON PEOPLES FACES AFTER THEY LOOSE EVERYTHING IS TERRIBLE; AND STATE WE ARE NOT INSURED.

④ CITY AND COUNCILS TO RANDOM INSPECTION TO ENSURE FIRE BREAKS ARE INSTALLED AND OWNERS KEEP THEIR LOTS CLEAN AND TIDY.

⑤ PEOPLE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN ACTIONS; IF (A ABOVE) IS NOT CARRIED OUT.

⑥ Allow LOCAL BRIGADE TO HAVE MORE SAY - CONTROL.

ON A FEW DAYS A YEAR WITH VERY HOT NORTH EAST WINDS (IN PARTICULAR) FIRMS ARE UNCONTROLLABLE. THE FIRMS HAVE MINDS OF THEIR OWN

Yours Faithfully

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

FEB 25 2016

MR EVAN FERGUSON,

SUBMISSION FOR WAROONA-YARLOOP-PRESTON BEACH  
BUSH FIRES

Not enough clear updates of the impending fire  
Too much reliance on Social Media

Not enough response to the initial fire  
at Lane Poole.

More involvement needed of local knowledge  
from local farmers and fire fighters  
Less control from central figures in the  
City. They lack knowledge of rural  
circumstances, IE. winds and density of  
forested terrain.

More local police involvement as in  
door knocking. To warn residents.

Lack of power was a huge factor in this fire  
Hence no water, thus no back up power  
for the local water supply, IE. NO GENERATOR  
kept on hand at the power supply

Each year these fires have threatened these  
towns, there should be more fire control  
as in pre-burning. Our town was an overgrown  
tinder box.

Trees in suburbia should be controlled by local shires, NOT to be allowed to exceed six metres

Yarloop was full of huge eucalypt trees and overgrown with Victorian Kete tree

Also peoples yards were allowed to become overgrown with weeds and accumulation of rubbish and car bodies, this is a down fall of the shire. There should be more control over this

I knew that this fire was as severe as a fire can be, I witnessed <sup>as</sup> the town became consumed by it.

I feel nothing could have saved the town because it was like a fire storm. But at some point it could have and should have been contained at an early stage:



**A REFLECTION ON FIRE PREVENTION / MANAGEMENT - IN RELATION TO OUTCOMES  
FROM THE CASCADES FIRE, 17/11/15 from an Adjoining Shire  
Perspective.**

Having farmed in the North West of the Ravensthorpe Shire for the last 35 years and acting initially as a Bush Fire Control officer, then Fire Weather Officer and since the mid-90's as Deputy Chief Bush fire Control Officer I have a good background in fire prevention, mitigation and fire management.

Immediately following the severe Cascade fire on 17/11/15, I attended the fire as part of a Ravensthorpe crew in order to facilitate back burning, perimeter break installation and primary suppression .The severity of this fire and direct outcome on many families known to me personally, has left a major impact.

I have witnessed many fires and a common theme is generally apparent.

Fires that emanate from private property, whether they are initiated by lightning or accidental ( usually harvesting operations) are generally extinguished and fully contained on the day of ignition , primarily due to the rapid response outcome of neighbours helping neighbours under the umbrella of the Local Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. It is rare for these fires to cause significant infrastructure damage and exceed 200 ha in size. The key themes to this success are rapid response, local knowledge, considerable resources (water and earthmoving) and minimal external constraints in relation to resolving the immediate issue (local control and no bureaucratic process).

On the other hand Ravensthorpe Shire has been impacted regularly by major fires (70,000-300.000 ha) all of which have started in Crown Land (bush).Fire ignition occurred in bush which had no or minimal provision in terms of fuel reduction, fire break implementation and in most cases immediate response to control was poor. Poor interaction from the relevant Government agencies often inhibited good decision making and response

All these fires were ignited by lightning (sometimes multiple strikes, with subsequent fires joining), exhibited severe fire behaviour, long fire runs ( up to 26 km in 24 hours), burnt for considerable periods, were a major drain on local volunteers / resources, Local Government and State Government Agencies (SES, DFES, DPAW,Police etc.) Considerable "special request" funds from State Treasury were often needed to achieve fire suppression

*These fires all directly impacted on adjoining privately owned farming property*

The major fires include	1) Coujanup (UCL)	1979	150.000 ha
	2) Fitzgerald National Park-	1984	150.000 ha
	3) Fitzgerald National Park-	1989	250.000 ha
	4) Lake Tay ( UCL) -	2003	304.000 ha ( At the time
	4) Cocanarup (Timber Reserve)	2006	80.000 ha

(Ref Rod Daw. Ravensthorpe CBFCA)

70% of Ravensthorpe Shire is bush, the majority of this is owned by the Crown- Mining Tenement, UCL, designated reserves or National Park.

A formal fire management plan was developed for the Fitzgerald National Park following the major 1989 fire. This primarily involved burning on a rotational basis individual cells in an endeavour to negate the possibility of major fire runs and maintenance of a boundary break system. The same provisions were not applied to the other crown bush within the Shire. Over time this plan has been “diluted” and it would appear that the current fire management regime within this iconic park is less than optimum.

Between 2002 -2006 in response to the relatively frequent fire outcome within our Shire the Ravensthorpe Chief Bush Fire Control Officer, Rod Daw in conjunction with then CALM employee Mal Grant reviewed the fire management of all Ravensthorpe bush without a specified plan .This plan is known as “Ravensthorpe Strategic Fire Prevention Plan “(Rod Daw and Mal Grant subsequently were recognised and awarded at a National level- Pre Disaster Mitigation, 2006).This resulted in a specific outcome. 80 cells/ 1800 km tracks were identified and the provision for specific break implementation, fuel reduction and access tracks were outlined. This plan was costed and initially implemented. Unfortunately , again, due to constraints on State Gov. funding the ongoing application of “on ground “implementation is well below optimum and significant funds, possibly in the order of \$200,000 are needed to achieve reinstatement. Annual subsequent maintenance funds would be approximately \$30,000.

### **From an overall perspective please reflect on the following**

Time and time again we have a review into a major fire, right back to the 1961 Dwellingup Fire ( and probably before), Recommendations are made, often implemented, but over time these become “watered” down or are not even applied. The fundamentals however do not change with time

- 1) Fire behaviour increases with fuel load, fuel load reduction is essential (and now may be being impacted by severe weather events linked to climate change) Lightning is a natural phenomenon and can strike anywhere.
- 2) The suppression and extinguishment of fire in the Australian Bush is facilitated by the implementation and maintenance of good low fuel firebreaks.
- 3) Fire size and behaviour can increase rapidly when the South Coast experiences adverse weather conditions. It is important to have a local / reactive capacity to achieve the quickest possible suppression

In farming (broad acre) farming areas there is significant local machinery/ earthmoving capability which could be utilised to achieve positive fire outcomes on Crown land. The mobilisation time (Distances involved) in regional WA are a major constraint in relation to timely contractor or DPAW machine utilisation.

The involvement of multiple Government agencies and “layers “of bureaucracy generally do not facilitate a positive outcome for the “on ground” fire fighters, especially for those who are volunteers. Most volunteers do not respect external authority, primarily because of their lack of local knowledge.

It would appear that DFES have a “top down” mentality which does not sit well with volunteers. We appear to be developing more bureaucratic layers over time and it is very apparent that those with responsibility are unwilling (or unable) to make timely, achievable and appropriate determinations because of concerns about negative outcomes (Duty of care, Liability risk, etc.) This is even starting impact on the volunteer regime and is acting as a constraint on the next generation volunteering their time.

The WA State Government needs to accept responsibility for all fire management aspects of its landholding so that adjoining private property holders are not impacted. I have major concerns that the current DFES provisions in relation to Bush Fire Mitigation planning at a local Government level will not be funded sufficiently to develop fire management plans for the vast areas of bush within Ravensthorpe and Esperance Shires ( There appears to be a focus on town site planning)

Significant population decline in the more remote farming areas adjoining Crown land where the risk of fire is high (Eastern South Coast and Central West) is impacting the local communities ability to respond and resolve major fires emanating from Crown Land

The total cost of supplementary State Treasury funding expended on major fires is significant. The cost applied to major fires need to be quantified and a basic cost / benefit analysis applied in relation to being more proactive in relation to fire mitigation. Whilst we will never alleviate the risk of major fire completely, a proactive approach centred on fuel reduction and break maintenance is far more desirable ( and probably less costly) than the recent loss of life, housing and farming infrastructure we have witnessed time and time again in WA.

Having represented Local Government in relation to the development of Fire Management plans in relation to specific reserves (Dunn Rock, Magenta etc.) it is of concern that the relative State Government Agency personnel (CALM, now DPAW) often do not place a high value in farming assets in context of the risk of a fire emanating from Crown bush impacting on private property.

There is growing cynicism about the number (and cost) of DFES personnel based in the metropolitan area in relation to the need for fire management funding and resources in the rural environment.

At the Cascades fire Horizon Power were on the fire ground assessing, resolving safety issues and endeavouring to reinstate infrastructure within 24 hours of the fire event and they should be congratulated for their efforts. It would appear that the capacity or endeavours of Telstra in relation to resolving the mobile phone network left a lot to be desired and they need to develop a quick response model to alleviate communication loss in the event of major fire such as seen at Cascades.

If following a major fire event fair and reasonable access is denied or restricted for Agricultural businesses in order to facilitate livestock welfare concerns or other important production issues this policy may eventuate in individuals staying to protect rather than leaving the fire ground and this has the potential to place more in harm's way.

Urban based agency support (DFES, DPAW etc.) is of no value when lines of communication are lost, as often occurs at major fires.

A local Government such as Ravensthorpe Shire, which has 70% of its total land area as unrateable land (Crown Bush) does not have the financial capacity to fund or implement fuel reduction/ fire break implementation and management on Crown Land

**In conclusion:**

***All Crown land needs have an applied fire management plan. (Fuel reduction and appropriate external firebreaks) The current negligence in the context of Crown Land fire management in Ravensthorpe (and adjoining) Shires is exposing our communities to significant unheeded risk. Despite these concerns being raised directly by our local Council with the relevant State Minister funding has not been provided at an acceptable level. Ravensthorpe Shire is overdue for another significant Crown land fire, similar to that experienced in Cascades, Esperance late last year.***

***Volunteer firefighters must be able to function in a proactive manner with minimal bureaucratic impositions, especially in the early phase of a fire.***

***If DFES continues to evolve as a metro centric bureaucratic "top down" agency it risks disenfranchising the core of dedicated Bush Fire Volunteers in WA. e.g. – Regional funding deficiencies, Equipment not fit for purpose, Disregard of advisory group recommendations, Multi layered decision processes (delays and unwillingness to accept responsibility) DFES personnel not fulfilling required roles etc.***

***If we heeded the lessons from the past major fires review outcomes it is unlikely that we would have witnessed the carnage seen recently in Rural Western Australia.***

I have made the above comments after considered deliberation and would welcome any questions or requests for clarification

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

P [REDACTED]

Mob [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
9 MARCO

Dear Sir,

I would like to put in submission in the enquiry into the Waroona fires in January

I live at [REDACTED] a back block in Harvey off the Forestry Road

My complaint is the lack of fuel reduction and mismanagement of the shire approvals with no thought to the fire hazards on the approval of a timber mill 700Mtrs from my home

Our property is 7acres over the road is the reserve, next door is a property with 350 acres of bush which has had no fire reductions in 25plus years but has the required fire breaks with over hanging bushes the length of it which is not really the required fire break this bush backs onto the tip and also runs along side of our property and a timber mill the adjoins our property .

1/ the shire in the wisdom have allow the new timber mill shed, whenever its going to be built to be closer to this 350acres I am awaiting a rely to a recent email of the distance but after this fire I am hoping the distance of the shed for the mill will be revisited so that the mill is not closer to this bush but in a cleared spot but I fear like the waroona fire 12mths ago nothing is learnt

2/ The road we live on is a limestone road and the end near the pines is a 4wd track on a GPS it is shown as a through road and I was told to leave my home this way by a fire person only for me to tell him it was impassable for my car and dog trailer this road needs to have the last 100mtrs of limestone is needed and this would give us two exits in the case of fire

3/ The reserve is owned Im told by the shire by ; EXTRACT FROM MR FRANCIS EMAIL

In regards to the Reserve this is owned by the State of Western Australia and VESTED with Water Corporation and I suggest should you have any issues with this reserve to contact Water Corporation in a email from the ranger Mr Francis apparently the shire have no control to make sure fire breaks and the fuel load are done I was given no contact number

5/ The timber mill was allowed to operate with no fire plan in place with high fuel loads pushed into the bush I asked at the planning meeting in December 2014 if the shire was aware of the high fuel load and Mr. Hill answer was no, my question is why did he not

know why was it allowed to operate without any safety for adjoining landowners

6/ large tracks of land with no fuel reductions in years this needs to be addressed people cant just sit on 300 plus acres for years with no fuel reduction and a 3mtr fire break it is just not safe for adjoining land owners and fire fighters we must all work for a fire safer environment

a copy of the first email I sent the shire and the timber mill had been approved for more the 10mths at this time but been in operation for over 20yrs so I was told at the planning meeting

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2015 11:01 AM  
To: Neville Dowling  
Cc: Michael Parker; Simon Hall  
Subject: Crampton road fire hazard

Dear Neville

Good morning ,further to our phone conversation about the excessive fuel load at the timber mill as my home is approximately 700meters from the mill this hazard is of a grave concern .

From the road you can see a heap off rubbish wood piled high goodness knows what other fire hazards are on the property there has been a lot of logs going in a very little processed timber coming out ,my wife was told at meeting for planning that there would be fire fighting equipment but nothing appears to have be implemented.

Should a fire start with so much fuel load next to tender dry bush I fear the outcome you have residents that can't get to safety if the road is ablaze as the other end of Crampton road is not limestone but bottomless sand ,this timber is opposite a pine plantation and the shire have not made any attempt to clear any dead growth from the verge , there is also the reserve which I believe the water Corp own and no fuel reduction has been done in years.

A drive down Crampton road and anyone can see the rubbish dry wood on the verges is it because we only get residential traffic that nothing is done this is a fire harzard that is the shire responsibility that has been neglected for years and now with a timber mill storing tons of logs these issues can not be swept aside they have to be addressed as fire hazards fixed for everyone

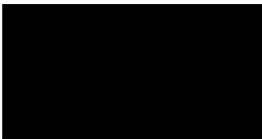
safety .

Can you advise me what fuel reductions and fire breaks will be done to try and make the Crampton road safer from fire for the residents and what is in place at the mill should a fire start .

Surely you can't have waste wood just stacked and nothing in place such as a substantial clearing between it and the bush and also some appropriate fire fighting equipment .

This year is one of the driest on records and the hill fires at Warrona last year should warn us that you have to be diligent.

Awaiting your urgent reply



One of there replies and it took several email to get it thru to Mr Dowling that I was not interested in when the shed was built but the fire plan for this fire season he just kept saying when the shed was built and trying to get it through that the timber mill was in operation now and the fire danger was now not when the shed was built we were 9 months after the mill was approved a no shed was in sight I was not against the mill but against the way it was run with no fire plan tons of timber and shit everywhere , and even from the road you could see piles of timber Im not talking about little piles but higher than houses piled up against bush and in this email Mr Dowling cant even get the year correct it was approved by shire in 2014 not 2015 .

**From:** "Neville Dowling" <[nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au)>

**Date:** 30 October 2015 9:17:52 am AWST

**To:** 

**Cc:** "Simon Hall" <[Simonh@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:Simonh@harvey.wa.gov.au)>, "Peter Kay"

<[PeterK@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:PeterK@harvey.wa.gov.au)>, "Tony Francis" <[tonyf@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:tonyf@harvey.wa.gov.au)>

**Subject:** RE: Crampton road fire hazard - 15/32805

Hi 

Thank you for your email dated 28th October 2015 regarding fire hazards associated with the Sawmill at Lot 341 Crampton Road, dead growth in the Crampton Road reserve and fuel reduction in the Water Corp reserve.

As mentioned previously the operator of the sawmill is in the process of formulating a fire management plan (FMP). This is a requirement prior to a building permit being issued for the proposed 450m2 shed which was approved by Council on the 14th December 2015. The FMP is being compiled by Calibre Consultants and will require Shire approval before it is implemented however the principle measures are likely to be:

- A loop road around the building;

- A 20m building protection zone;
- A 3m firebreak around the development and wood storage area;
- A 10,000L tank for firefighting;
- A 400L slip on fire unit;
- Normal standards for the driveway and access gate.

There will also be general conditions relating to Council's firebreak notice and not operating during Total Fire Bans. A site inspection on 29th October 2015 of Lot 341 Crampton Road revealed that many of the woodpiles are too close to vegetation and that a setback should be imposed on the distance of the wood piles and timber stacks to vegetation. The matter of dead growth in the Crampton Road verge and hazard reduction of the Water Corp Drainage Easement will be relayed to Council's Works & Services Department & Rangers Department. I hope to have a response from them regarding further action in the next few days.

Regards

//////////

Neville Dowling  
 Planning Officer  
 Shire of Harvey  
 PO Box 500  
 Harvey WA 6220

Phone: 9729 0312  
 Fax: 9729 2053

This was way back in October and the last email I got was from the Ranger and nothing from the works departments  
 Nothing was done even though the shire admit I was correct in the load of dry timber off cuts piled high against the bush, the fire breaks where overhanging with bushes and the verges a disgrace just full of leaves dead bushes you still can see how bad the verges where from where the fire burnt

I have sent a recent email to the shire but I feel it again will be like pulling teeth I want to feel safe in my home if they want to approve a business like a timber mill then they need to make sure it operates safely not a backyard arrangement with no thought to the safety of other people in the area

I was here when that mill blew up he had fuel stored amongst the timber that just blew up he had tons of saw dust that should have been kept to a minimum but like everything is this area out of sight out of mind

How can a person try to heal after running from this fire and have told the powers to be of the danger only to be ignored back in October of 2015 the mill was approved in December 2014 it had been in operation for 20yrs or so we are told and never a tank for water or a pump and all the shire were interested in was when the stupid shed went in all I wanted was a fire plan in place not a piece of paper a fire plan with pumps and water and the timber rubbish away from the bush and the fire breaks to be at least done correctly I still feel it should be a

20mtr fire break around a timber mill like a pine plantation ...I want the verges maintained that if there is a fire that its not fueled by the rubbish that is allowed to build up ...we are not allowed to remove any vegetation from the verges and the shire does not do anything to the verges only make it worse when grading the road by pushing any dead timber into the verges , western power also have used the verges and the reserve when trimming under the power lines because they know that if someone complains which I have done you are pushed from department to the next so its left to burn in fires like this one.

So how does the shire walk away from this fire declaring it a natural disaster when they were told of the fire danger in Crampton Road ?

How can the last 100metres of Crampton Road remain a 4wd track we need two exits out?

How can a industry like a timber mill operate with tons of timber and fuel stored all over the place with no fire plan please note this is not a hobby but a registered business with a duty of care or at least it suppose to have a duty of care?

The firefighters did not even know they had a timber mill there and the one I spoke to was horrified with the amount of timber and saw dust piled high all over the place.

How can this same industry be moved closer to 350acres of uncleared land that back onto the tip surely this cant happen now with what happened in the last fire?

We pay rates to the shire we have to get approvals for things I always thought this was to keep everyone property safe ...but in the Harvey shire they seem to have loss reasoning. The timber Mill was granted approval with very little thought for the safety of adjoining neighbors I went to the first planning meeting and I am not a great speaker but had a list of question and most were answered with I don't know .....the approval was a fait of complete and nothing I said would have made a difference.

I accepted the timber mill approval even though it was carting a lot more timber in that they said in the application ...blind Freddie could see heaps of timber going in and nothing coming out but the shire when told and inspected and again blind Freddie could see the fuel load on the property on the verges in the reserve but the shire chose to ignore it now most of the natural bush in the reserve is burnt there is a D9 dozen track through it, the mill structure and saws and stacks of wood and saw dust has been burnt

My question to the shire and you people are we going to be paid lip service and say the fire was a natural disaster nothing could have prevented it or in this case the shire going to have to implement it rules and clean up our verges now and the reserve and how do we get crampton road open to the pines at least this is a safety issued and I want the timber mill closed until it meets the shire requirements I am not being put back in the same situation in a few years

And people with large track of bush land made to reduce their fuel load; one-person love of the bush should not impede the safety of neighbors a 3mtr fire break it not sufficient when there is a house and the adjoining property does no fire reduction ...this is a danger to the person home and welfare I had to sit through the last fire and pray that the timber mill did not get into the adjoining property which as I have said had no fuel reduction in over 25yrs I left here with the firefighter's using our fire pump to water down the bush next door we were lucky the fire was retained in the timber mill not because of the timber mill fire plan that was still be written up but the fact that they dozed fire breaks throughout the property

With the fire coming within 20mtrs of our home we were lucky that the wind was walking not blowing like when it hit Yarloop but I can only keep repeating that if the shire had done its job re the timber mill ,the verges, the reserve and the 4wd track ,the fire might not had done the damage it did in crampton road and be contained a lot sooner without putting so many firefighters in danger

The mill kept the firefighters doing patrols for many days after the fire was contained I am sure the firefighters would have like to have gone home but with the timber piles and sawdust piles still smoldering they had to keep a eye on it and have a water truck on hand ...

What more could a person had done I sent emails pointed out the dangers and was completed ignored this inquiry needs to get to the bottom of why the planning department did a site inspection months after the mill was inspected saw the danger at the mill and did nothing and why Mr Hill the head of the planning department knew nothing of the excessive fuel load when asked at a planning meeting in 2014 why was a mill approved without showing the counselors were it was located right opposite a pine plantation and how it was approved and allowed to run with piles of rubbish wood and sawdust in piles thought-out the property and in places right up to the bush

If I could see the danger why could not the people who are paid to do a job and look into these matters why could they not see the danger and again why was the timber mill allowed to continue to operate when in a email to me Mr Dowling states that there was piles of timber backing into the bush to me the shire again neglected it duty of care.

The ranger did email me a copy as follows this was the last email I got from the shire they went off for Christmas came back in the new year and left me to run from a bush fire that should never had got so out of control in my area if only the shire had of acted and did there job.

M/S [REDACTED]

In reply to your email I advise that Neville Dowling will reply as to the FMP progress in due course.

There are no specific instructions/orders in Councils Fire Break Orders to timber mills.. This property will be inspected during the normal course of the Rangers fire break inspections which commence on the 1st December and should there be any issues they will be addressed with the owners. These inspections are not connected with the planning application.

In regards to the Reserve this is owned by the State of Western Australia and VESTED with Water Corporation and I suggest should you have any issues with this reserve to contact Water Corporation.

In relation to the road verges Mr Peter Kay , Engineering Department is aware of your email and will be in contact shortly

Regards

Tony Francis

This is the last email I got its dated the 30<sup>th</sup> November the fire started the 6<sup>th</sup> January so Mr Francis did nothing with my concerned either or so it seems

--

A question I would like answered they had a D9 Dozer here for the reserve on the Friday night why was not the timber mill cleared around before it caught fire is there a rule somewhere in the fire act that the property has to be burning before a firebreak can be done by the firies if so this needs to be amended because it like shutting the gate once the dog is out.

The fire has scar us I run our kennels and had to evacuate and even after two attempts had to leave dogs these dogs would have been burnt to death had the fire got in the adjoining neighbors property we saw fuel blowing up at the timber

mill we had water bombers over us and running to get our animals out we had taken every fire precaution we could of, only to see the fuel load in crampton road and adjoining neighbors properties put our home and kennels at risk this fuel load was know and acknowledge by the shire.

We would like to attend your enquiry my husband works away and would have to fall in the dates his home, we really want answers we have been trying to get straight answers from the shire but just hit a brick wall.



## WILLINGE Barbara

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 2 March 2016 4:17 PM  
**To:** WILLINGE Barbara  
**Subject:** Fwd: fire hazard at the mill on crampton road 16/06721

Dear Barbara,

I have just received the enclosed email from the shire it seems that heaps of timber piled high is within there fire plan approvals , and the need to open the end of crampton road my god people nearly getting burnt to death is no need can this email be added to my submission this is what we are up against the lot number is not the bush I am referring to this lot number does not adjoin me and I asked that the timber mill not be in operation until they have a fire plan in action and they are still throwing the the new timber mill i want this mill stopped operation until it complies with or without its new shed furthermore over hanging branches is not on my property but at the mill and adjoining properties why is the ranger inspected the property for fire break did not feel that the mill needed to have a clear fire break seems that there is no fire plan required for the current timber mill

Hope this can be added

Regards  
[REDACTED]

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Neville Dowling" <[nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au)>  
**Subject:** RE: fire hazard at the mill on crampton road 16/06721  
**Date:** 2 March 2016 3:26:06 pm AWST  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** "Michael Parker" <[Michael@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:Michael@harvey.wa.gov.au)>, "Simon Hall" <[Simonh@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:Simonh@harvey.wa.gov.au)>, <[rons@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:rons@harvey.wa.gov.au)>, "Tony Francis" <[tonyf@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:tonyf@harvey.wa.gov.au)>, "Mike Carter" <[michaelc@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:michaelc@harvey.wa.gov.au)>

Hello Francis

Thank you for your queries and I refer to your last email to the Shire of Harvey dated Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2016.

Your reference to evacuation because of the timber mill 'blowing up'.

Lot 341 Crampton Road, Uduc was inspected by Rangers in the normal course of their fire break inspections prior to commencement of the Waroona fire which in turn moved through Yarloop and areas such as Crampton Road. The property was deemed compliant. It is considered that currently there are ample fire breaks in and around this property and there is a large amount of milled and unmilled timber on a section of this block which is surrounded by fire breaks and mostly green grass from the recent rains. The existing mill has been destroyed by the fire along with a large amount of timber.

The fires from Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January onwards into the following week were comprehensive across large areas extending from Waroona in the north down to the Uduc area in the south as well as northern areas of Myalup in the west and around Logue Brook Road in the hills to the east. During this time the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the local fire brigade chief's requested evacuation of all localities within this area and including the town sites of

Harvey, Yarloop, Waroona, Myalup and Binningup. It is noted that the Timber Mill was substantially burnt during the fires but it is not the primary cause of fires reaching into your area.

1. Northern End of Crampton Road (Road into the pines)

Council have not identified the need to have the road extended beyond the current end of the limestone road. The 4WD track was pushed through by people who chose to risk damaging their vehicles to "shortcut" through to Goss Road and we have never encouraged this activity.

2. Fire Breaks

The keeping clear of branches is the responsibility of the landowner.

3. The Timber Mill & Fire Plan

The applicant, Mr Greg Esmond was required as a condition of planning approval (22<sup>nd</sup> December 2014) for the proposed Sawmill and Shed, not the existing situation. The Fire Management Plan is required to be approved and implemented before a building permit can be issued for the proposed shed. A draft Fire Plan was submitted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015 and forwarded to the Shire's Chief Bushfire Control Officer however the Bush Fire Plan (prepared by Calibre Consultants) was found to be inadequate and further work was requested for the plan to be acceptable. Mr Esmond and the consultants have been contacted regarding their future intentions for the site and as yet we do not have an answer as to whether they intend to continue with the proposed mill. The new timber mill shed, if constructed, is proposed to be located approximately 420 metres north of Lot 4748 (you have mentioned as the approx. 350 acres lot). A Fire Management Plan will need to be approved by the Shire

4. The Water Corp Reserve

The Water Corporation as a state entity is not bound by the Bushfire Act; however the contact at the Water Corporation Bunbury is Mr Peter Buckley 13 13 85.

5. Unacceptable Fuel Load in Lot 341 Crampton Road

As per the above comments in point 3.

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 2 March 2016 2:53 PM  
**To:** Neville Dowling  
**Cc:** Michael Parker; Simon Hall  
**Subject:** Re: fire hazard at the mill on crampton road 15/33598

Good morning Neville,

When can i expect an acknowledgment of this email that i sent to you 17th February ,can i please have answers to my questions

Further to all my emails the last dated the 30th November 2015, which the only reply I got was from the Tony Francis the ranger no one else bother to reply of corse you gave me a tongue in cheek reply now after the mill caught fire along with the reserve and most of the verges what is the shire plan of action now

I was evacuated because the timber mill just blew up you were aware of the fuel load I told you all I got back was when the shed was built, I told you there was tons of timber there still is now ,I want the shire to give me a undertaking that this mill will operate within the boundaries that the planners put forward and this time not shoved under the carpet I want a fire plan in action not in writing

If I sound angry I am we nearly lost our home and kennels not once but twice and my anger is at the shire you were told and nothing was done , you sent me email you saw the timber up against the bush and again

nothing was done I never even got a reply re the state of the verges and flogged off about the reserve well I will not be flogged off now I will be putting my submission into the enquiry that is being held

but what I want now is some replies and actions

1/ the road into the pines tell me how we get it limestone people were directed out that way and its a bad 4wd track how does one get it limestone so at least people and firies have a way out if the other end is blocked by fire or anything else for that matter has anyone thought that if the pine planation on forestry road next to this road had caught fire the fire fighters had to go all the way around

2/ fire breaks can the shire make sure that the fire breaks are not overhanging with branches and are the required distance seems we are out of sight out of mind here

3/ the timber mill not to be in operation until the planners requirements are met I am dammed if I am having my life threaten again by a raging fire because someone is not doing there job this mill not only had piles of dry timber overhanging fire breaks and containers of fuel .Did the shire ever receive the fire plan and if they did what date was it to be implemented ?

In regards to the new location can you please advise me how far the shed at the timber mill is from the 350 acres next door that backs onto the tip maybe the location may have to be revisited due to the location of the adjoining bush to the tip lets say that something positive will come out of this fire

4/ the reserve what is going to happen with this now is the shire going to get the water corp to clean it up and maintain it that its not a threat if you can't then at least give me a contact and I will contact them but it seems stupid that you cannot make everyone meet fire requirements even the government departments

5/ in my previous emails I pointed all the above and you people put it in the too hard basket well the fire I was praying would not happen did happen and some will say it was a natural disaster but when people are telling the people that are suppose to be looking after us that there is a danger and you people do nothing it makes me sick in the stomach this was a disaster waiting to happen and a lot of the damage was the shire not allowing people to keep there verges clean if the owners are not allowed this has to become a shire resposabillty not just forgotten about like it has been in the pass. And if people like the timber mill has great loads of timber and are required to have fire plans in place that the shire make sure that there fire plans are not being drawn up but ready to be put into action before they are allowed to operate

The shire cannot approve things and never follow up,the amount of fuel load in the timber mill and in crampton road was unacceptable which was pointed out to the shire before the fire this email is not about hindsight you were informed before the fire not after

Awaiting your reply

[REDACTED]  
please note email address [REDACTED]

On 30 Nov 2015, at 11:07 am, [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi Neville

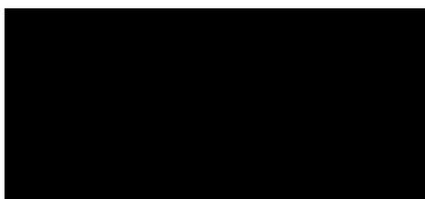
Well its a day away from the 1st of November and we have not received what will be done re the fire hazard at the mill all very well for a consultant to advise you that there will be a Fire Management Plan but is it in place this year ?you sent us a copy of normal fire breaks required for normal rural blocks surely a timber

mill with tons of dry timber required more than a normal rural blocks .....can you please advise us what the shire requirements are for a timber mill..

Also what is happening re the fire breaks on the reserve? I think 8 plus years without any fire breaks on the reserve is long enough .....and the verges need attention your email of the 30th October said that you expected a response from the Councils works & services Departments and the Rangers Department in the next few days well its a month now and we have still not got a answer

You only need watch the news to realise we are having a bad fire year and the above items need attention now not next year should a fire happen in the mill or on the reserve there are people that live further down that cannot even get out as the other end of crampton road is a 4wd drive track only

Awaiting your reply



On 11 Nov 2015, at 12:28 pm, Neville Dowling <[nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au)> wrote:

Sorry previous email went to the wrong address.

Regards

Neville Dowling  
Planning Officer  
Shire of Harvey  
PO Box 500  
Harvey WA 6220

<image001.png>

Phone: 9729 0312  
Fax: 9729 2053  
Email: [nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:nevilled@harvey.wa.gov.au)

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**From:** Neville Dowling  
**Sent:** Friday, 6 November 2015 10:16 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** Simon Hall  
**Subject:** RE: fire hazard at the mill on crampton road 15/33598

Hi [REDACTED]

The Manager Law and Safety Services has indicated that the rangers will be inspecting the property on receipt of the Fire Management Plan and if not received, will endeavour to inspect the property prior to 1<sup>st</sup>December. Information on fire break requirements is attached. The consultant compiling the Fire Management Plan has said that they will be providing a 10,000L tank for firefighting and a 400L slip on fire unit in terms of fire fighting equipment.

Regards

Neville Dowling  
Planning Officer  
Shire of Harvey  
PO Box 500  
Harvey WA 6220

<image001.png>

Phone: 9729 0312  
Fax: 9729 2053  
Email: [neville@harvey.wa.gov.au](mailto:neville@harvey.wa.gov.au)

---

**From:** Email Journal  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 November 2015 8:22 AM  
**To:** Neville Dowling  
**Subject:** FW: fire hazard at the mill on crampton road 15/33598

This has been saved to RecFind – See 15/33598

Bec

---

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 November 2015 7:39 PM  
**To:** Neville Dowling  
**Cc:** Michael Parker; Simon Hall  
**Subject:** fire hazard at the mill on crampton road

Dear Neville ,

Thank you for your email dated 30th October ,i am looking forward to your update on the fire hazard on the verges and the reserve on Crampton Road.

But you really have not told us what is happening this fire season re fuel reductions at the timber mill .

1/ Did the senior fire ranger inspect the fuel load ?

2/ what is the shire requirements for fire breaks and fuel loads close to vegetation as it is at the mill ?

3/ If the operator of the timber mill is purposing a 20mtr buffer zone around his shed when approved why is the shire not requiring any fire zones around his currently location as the mill is operating not standing idle waiting for the shed ?

4/ is the shire going to in force some sort of fire fighting equipment such as tanks this fire season and fuel

load reduction , or are you going to wait for the operator to put this all in writing for shire approval and we in Crampton road pray for no fire because as the mill stands today it's a big fire hazard ?

Regards



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This email was Virus checked by UTM 9. <http://www.sophos.com>  
<FireBreak2.pdf>

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This email was Virus checked by UTM 9. <http://www.sophos.com>

# WAROONA BUSHFIRE SPECIAL INQUIRY SUBMISSION

Submitted by [REDACTED]

Phone [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

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## **Preamble**

The submitters qualifications and experience in forest management over many years are attached as appendix 2

The submission concentrates on a review of three current management plans approved by the appropriate Minister of the State government These plans were implemented since 2011, the date fixed by the Terms of Reference of the Public Inquiry into (the) January 2016 Waroona Fire

The submission does not attempt to consider any of the details of section 1 apart from section 1.(a) and 1(b) because others will have an intimate knowledge of actual events that took place during the progress of the fire

Rather the submission concentrates on legislative, policy and functional review matters which are contained in Section 3 of the Terms of Reference

Details are explored of the marked changes in emphasis of management of south west forests following the split of the Department of Conservation and Land Management into two departments in 2000. State government legislation then led to policy reform and functional changes The effect of these changes was to abandon a successful and relatively cheap forest fire management regime based around a broad acre fuel reduction program in south west forests. The area of hazard reduction burning carried out annually plunged . The creation of additional national parks also resulted in a significant reduction in road access in forests. Significant falls in timber harvesting in remaining State forests and the closure of forest administrative centres also saw less people and heavy machinery immediately available for fire fighting Together these changes, in place for the last 15 years, have resulted a build up of fuel to the stage where , combined with a series of unfavourable weather conditions, made it inevitable that bushfires would occur. It postulates that government policy mirrored by forest management practices contributed substantially to the severity of the Waroona fire

The submission argues, by way of an example referencing the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Capes area Management Plan No 81, that unless immediate and drastic changes to existing fire management policies and strategies are not made , Western Australia faces even more catastrophic fires than the ones we have seen over the last 12 months that claimed 5 lives

Finally it recommends a number of legislative, policy and functional reforms to redress the current unsustainable situation

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

The substantive document covering the area of the Lane Poole Reserve where the fire caused by lightening started is Management Plan 68 named "The Lane Poole Reserve and Proposed Additions" compiled under the authority of the Conservation Council and issued by Minister Marmion on 4 October 2011. It is this document I refer to in addressing in my submission in relation to Item 1(a) and 1(b) and to a minor degree in 1 (c)

In Appendix 2, I draw attention to my considerable past experience as an incident manager in controlling large multiple fires. Nevertheless I am not familiar with the specific aspects contained in the other terms of reference 1, The Response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire, and it would be presumptuous to comment on particular matters

Reference is also made in this submission to the Management Plan produced for the Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park in 2015 and in particular the Boranup Forest. My submission addresses Terms of reference 2 "Lessons learned from previous bushfire emergencies", particularly subsection (ii) -. Report of the Special Inquiry into the November 2011 Margaret River Bushfire

However I also draw to the attention of the Special Inquirer Mr Euan Ferguson the fact that most of the reports included in Reference 2. concern the management practises of the Department of Parks and Wildlife and its predecessor the Department of Environment and Conservation.

It is obvious that the Department of Parks and Wildlife as its name suggests has an overarching management objective of managing and enhancing the biodiversity of the land under its control. It also allows the use of national parks by people in a controlled manner so as to minimise damage to biodiversity. Fire in all its forms is often inimical to what its managers see as their primary role above in managing land in accordance with the two management plans referred to, one only published during 2015 being some four years after the benchmark of 2011 bushfire reviews was used in the Terms of Reference

## **The Lane Poole Reserve and Proposed Reserve Additions - Management Plan No 68 (2011)**

### Overview

This Management Plan is undoubtedly an extremely comprehensive body of work. There appears to little doubt in the minds of readers (including me) that the primary objective of the plan, namely the protection and future enhancement of all the elements of biodiversity have been included. It demonstrates that policies and prescriptions for implementation of the are based on scientific oversight.

The second objective of the plan is to integrate management of thousands of tourists wishing to visit and enjoy the scenery; day use facilities and other attractions of the Reserve in accordance with recognised standards applying here and elsewhere in Australia and overseas.

Complementary WA legislation: policy objectives ; standards; and measurement of compliance by use of key performance indicators are also in place.

The treatment of fire management and bushfire control and mitigation

The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary defines a bushfire as a fire which burns through (often extensive) areas of natural vegetation, often causing loss of life and property)

In 2000, the State government altered the land tenure of large areas of the northern Jarrah forest . This resulted in significant alterations in fire policies .adopted .The then successful policy of broad acre prescribed burning to maintain the amount of fuel (litter) to manageable level supplemented by an integrated system of roads and tracks was abandoned in favour of limited burning and restriction of access.

Policies adopted in Management Plan No 68 followed a similar pattern, where fire management was reduced in importance. More people having biodiversity skills were employed to manage forests to meet the primary goals. In the preparation of plan 68 there appears to have been no people seconded that possessed significant experience of forest fire management.

### Result of the Policy

After 15 years a large build up of fuel had built up and the road system deteriorated, Ultimately a series of extreme weather conditions occurred favouring ignition by a dry lightning event. This coupled with insufficient bushfire hardened and specially trained staff contributed to the disaster that ensued . Delay in fire detection and reporting also was a contributing factor. The staff would have been under pressure.

As soon as the bushfire , now on a wide front, crossed lines on a map denoting change of tenure, control was handed over to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services . This was a very unsatisfactory situation.

### **REVIEW OF THE FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRESCRIPTIONS CONTAINED IN MANAGEMENT PLAN NO 68**

In the time available it has not been possible to carry out a thorough review on such a lengthy and comprehensive document.

## POLICY ADOPTED IN THE PLAN

- it is very clear that the overriding focus when discussing the topic of fire is to concentrate the effects of fire in managing and enhancing biodiversity. The philosophy adopted is that fire has a general negative effect except on particular habitats and species.
- Second in importance in the discussion regards management of tourists to ensure that access to them is controlled so their activities provides the least impact on the major objective of the plan. This has had the effect of reducing the overall access to the Lane Poole jarrah forest for fire management
- It is postulated that both these policies have a direct and significant negative effect on the ability of people charged with managing bushfires. The plan at page 48 goes as far as to say " -----it is not a valid reason to avoid taking action to conserve biodiversity and protect life and community assets from inappropriate fire regimes

## PRESCRIPTIVE ASPECTS

A sample of statements in the Plan have been selected to demonstrate that management of fire generally and Bushfires in particular have received scant recognition. Sadly this thinking also pervades the other two management plans reviewed

- There is no mention of bushfire protection in the Vision Statement. The vision statement may be recognised by some as the State governments policy position. on the Lane Poole Reserve and elsewhere in forest areas. This policy has by far the greatest impact on country people, There is virtually no impact to people in the city. Subsequent donations may make these people feel better. The government has to accept prime responsibility for the Waroona fire disaster
- The Executive Summary inter alia states " There are many threats to the natural values within the planning area. This management plan identifies these threats and suggests management strategies to minimise or mitigate their impact on natural values. Threats in the planning area include environmental weeds, introduced and other problem animals, disease (eg Phytophthora) and (my words lastly) inappropriate fire regimes. Given that for the last 15 years there has been virtually no broad acre fuel reduction program in south west forests. A valid assumption is that this activity is an inappropriate fire regime
- the section Proposed Changes to Public (and restricted ) access states - - "These changes will provide an improved organised and structural access to assist visitor experience ;addresses safety concerns and reduce conflicts between users " There is no mention of better access for bushfire control and mitigation
- Legislative or policy changes The development of the updated Policy Statement No19- fire management which includes 12 scientific principles which "places a greater emphasis on biodiversity management and fire ecology (ie a downgrading of previous successful fire protection methods)

- Page 47 Fire management within the planning area has a first priority to protect and conserve biodiversity . the second priority is to reduce the impact bushfire (sic) on life and community assets ; etc etc ( This is worse even than when Mick Malthouse a former West Coast Eagle coach was asked on TV would he rather have a friend or a tree replied solemnly "I would take the tree" )
- Page 48 A map depicts large no planned burn areas This prescription has obviously failed .
- There does not seem to be any recognition of bushfires caused by natural means like lightening .After all the 1961 Dwellingup fire was started by a number of dry lightening strikes igniting areas of heavy build up of litter estimated not to have been burnt since large fires in the late 1930's This resulted from a failed policy of attempting fire suppression in heavy fuels
- The prescription indicates "It will maintain a strategy for fire access network. This network MAY be maintained to ensure safe access for fire fighting vehicles .An annual track maintenance program will be developed considering potential impacts on other natural, cultural and recreation values
- **Continuing the narrative "Fires may be contained within management units defined by existing roads rather than by constructing new fire lines around the perimeter of the fire" This means there will be no direct attack on the perimeter of the fire including the head fire. The implementation of such a strategy means that a bushfire will, by definition, be allowed to get bigger before being attacked Such a notion is diametrically opposite to basic operational fire training**
- Page 48 Managing fire to conserve biodiversity " Fire managers recognise the uncertainty surrounding responses to fire (prescribed burns or bushfires) , but they also understand that it is not a valid approach to avoid taking action to conserve biodiversity and protect life and community assets from inappropriate fire regimes" This statement is contradictory as shown by the recent disaster
- To address these issues the department reduces the threat of bushfires to significant biological assets "by
  1. employing mosaic of fuel age classes ----or a system fuel reduced buffers specifically managed to reduce fuel around biological assets BUT elsewhere in the plan the idea is to reduce the number tracks which would be needed to separate fuel
  2. periodically undertaking strategic fuel reduction burning to mitigate effects of large bushfires (media reports indicate that the Department has not met very modest targets over the last 5 years
  3. integrating activities with adjoining state forests

## MANAGING FIRE TO PROTECT LIFE & COMMUNITY ASSETS

This section outlines strategies for bushfire mitigation. Items 1 through 6 are

standard messages common in many plans Item 7 concerns managing public access and maintaining access for fire management purposes

- On page 55 Key Performance Indicator targets 25.1 "No loss of life --- ---or significant community assets attributable to the Departments fire management . Report annually" Obviously this KPI has a failure rating. It is for others to judge how well the Department has performed in meeting the many KPI's that it has set for to gauge its performance

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ACTION TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THE LANE POOLE RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN NO 68 2011**

- The Plan is an impressive tome which appears to meet the major objectives of providing a framework of legislative policy and functional objectives It aims to conserve the natural biodiversity of the area of the plan; while maximising the use of the reserve by visitors under controlled conditions It is for others to judge its success
- However the major bushfire that emanated from the Lane Poole Reserve caused the loss of two lives; destroyed more than 180 homes and other structures; severely damaged farming properties; and caused significant human suffering and distress
- The purpose of my review of the plan was to gain an insight into the policy and practices contained therein gave sufficient weight to protect the defined values from Bushfires and fire generally. Obviously the fire defined that systemic failures had occurred over a considerable period of time
- As detailed earlier, fire has received almost minimal attention in the plan, particularly bushfire management The main focus is to measure the effect fire has on other park values. From an overall fire perspective the plan is a failure

### **Recommendations**

- Rewrite a complete new section which outlines management practices to be followed by the relevant agency henceforth. These be based on proven methods developed over almost 40 years based on a board acre fuel reduction program complemented by a systematic network of road access
- Ensure the Conservation Commission and the Forest Products Commission work in harmony to ensure changes in line with the final report of the Special Inquirer into the Waroona Bushfire are fully implemented within 12 months
- If required enact Legislative amendments to the Acts involving Fire Control .
- Mandate that the department publicly report actual performance against each KPI annually particularly those regarding fire

## **Term of Reference 3**

### **The need for further reform**

I contend that there is an extremely urgent need for legislative and policy changes to be made now to amend or renew the appropriate legislation covering bushfire control on all lands managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife. These changes would then require alterations to existing management plans

I have studied in some detail, as regards fire and or bushfires the contents of three Management Plans prepared by the Department of Parks and Wildlife for the Conservation Commission and approved by the relevant Minister since 2011, the date set by the terms of reference of this Inquiry

- the Lane Poole Reserve and proposed reserve additions Management Plan No 68 2011 Gazetted 2012(LPMP)
- The Leeuwin -Naturaliste Capes Area Parks and Reserves Management Plan No 81 January 2015 (LNMP)
- The Forest Management Plan (FMP) operative date January 1 2014

There is obviously an overarching theme in all three plans to protect and maximise ecosystem health and vitality and biodiversity, on all areas under the control and management of the Department., and covered by current legislation. The land management objectives contained in the Gazetted Management Plans and then practised by the Department aim to meet the Government's objectives

However the importance of bushfire control and mitigation contained in the three plans receives what can only be described as scant recognition. The chapters on fire in each plan is discussed towards the middle of documents over 100 pages in length. Even there the majority of the dialogue is devoted to the effects on fire on ecosystem health and other environmental factors. There is scant recognition of forest fire management essential for the protection of the very values recognised when the national parks were created; not to mention the major threats posed to adjacent land owners and the community at large, should forest fires caused by natural means or human activity. Even basic items such as detecting and controlling bushfires is missing

For example the "Goal" regarding fire in the FMP (p49) states inter alia "use and respond to a fire in a manner that promotes the maintenance of ecosystem health and vitality, the conservation of biodiversity, and mitigates the risk of the adverse impact of bushfires'.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) (p51) used to monitor the implementation of the FMP (which in my opinion should be the most relevant plan concerning forest management) regarding fire control, makes no mention of a KPI which would measure the effectiveness of:

the detection,  
mechanisms for controlling bushfires;

or any details of the many resources that an incident controller needs to win the battle against life threatening fires in extreme weather conditions in heavy fuel build up with little internal access

This is the current situation in many if not most of the high forest areas

The deaths of 5 people in less than 12 months :the destruction of about 200 homes and other structures; loss of income to primary producers; and above all else the sense of loss, personal stress and anxiety of the people directly affected cannot be measured .Coupled with the other fires that have been investigated previously since 2011 means in my opinion that the current land management and fire legislation and complementary management plans and other policy documents to give effect to the legislation , is fatally flawed. In particular at least some of the management plans covering land controlled by the Department of Parks and Wildlife give what could be described as superficial coverage to fire management and fire control

This situation then impinges on the way the Department carries out its functions, which also need a detailed review. I am not implying or alleging in any way that the present Departmental staff are not adequately trained , incompetent or negligent in carrying out their duties. Many of them are first class scientists . However the undeniable focus contained in management plans and functions is to manage land for its biodiversity and other nature conservation and cultural values . It is contended that additional senior people having fire control experience need to be appointed to ensure that these values are not devalued by periodic large uncontrolled bushfires

I have personal knowledge of and managed several of the areas investigated by previous inquiries . Without wishing to comment directly on what measures have actually been taken to implement the recommendations action taken to give effect to recommendations of the inquiries , it is obvious that not enough has been done, Hence the current Inquiry

It is the responsibility of the State Government to make legislative changes as soon as possible to minimise the likelihood of further deaths and property damage. In this regard, it is suggested that more emphasis be given to the integration of fire management practices with all other identified forest values In the meantime it is imperative, in forest areas at least, and before the next fire season, to make changes to work practises to facilitate fuel reduction burns and to urgently build additional ground access

**THE NEED FOR FURTHER REFORM**  
**EXAMPLE : THE LEEUWIN-NATURALISTE CAPES MANAGEMENT**  
**PLAN**  
**NO 81 (JANUARY 2015 )**

I wish to highlight the urgent need for legislative and policy reforms by reference to an area of the south west of WA which has not yet suffered the effects of basic flaws in the States legislative, policy and functional activities. To this end an example on our doorstep (albeit theoretical) of an area of high Karri and mixed forests unburnt for more than 50 years occurs approximately 20 kilometres north of the November 2011 Margaret River Bushfire

**IS THIS WHERE THE NEXT TRAGEDY COULD OCCUR IN SOUTH WEST FORESTS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA ?**

I do not wish to sound dramatic. Nevertheless may I give the Special Inquirer Mr Ferguson specific information regarding an area of forest known as the Boranup Forest which is covered by the very recent gazettal of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Capes and Reserves Management Plan 81 of January 2015

This Plan was finalised (see item 2 (a) (ii) of the Terms of Reference) some 3 years after the report by Keelty -Report of the Special Inquiry into the November 2011 Margaret River Bushfire

The Key Values and Management Issues contained in the 2015 Management Plan state

"It is clear that there are many biological, ecological, cultural, tourism, and scenic values within the area covered by the Plan

The Management Plan attempts to balance these values taking into consideration "altered fire regime and the threat of bushfire to life and property values (MPp3))"

the term "altered fire regime is not defined. However evidence in my possession indicates that the forest has not been burnt for more than 40 years so no burning seems to be an implied definition

The Management Directions(MD) Section states "while the MP recognises visitor activities are to be encouraged "where they do not compromise natural cultural or heritage values the MD does not mention how the area is to be protected against fire caused by tourists, campers or others , escapes from local communities or natural causes such as lightning

The management plan proposes that rather than burning, the build up of inflammable material could be ameliorated by scrub rolling. This prescription does nothing to reduce the overall fuel load Secondly the plan advocates road access be restricted Previous tracks created by the timber industry and Forests Department workers have been left in complete disrepair . The basic tenet of fire control is to

reduce the quantity of material that is available to burn while providing access to fight the fire and using tracks as a base to burn back. If I was the manager of that forest now I would be extremely ashamed at the complete lack of preparedness which is obvious to even a relatively untrained person.

The effect on the local community of an uncontrolled bushfire emanating from the unburnt boranup forest would be catastrophic given that Karridale, Hamelin Bay Kudardup, and Augusta are from 8 to 18 kilometres south east of the northern intersection of Boranup Drive and Caves Road where the attached photos were taken on 25 February 2016 (see Appendix One,). Karridale is only about 3 kilometres from the nearest boundary of Boranup.

- Photos 1 to 4 show the northern intersection of Boranup Drive and Caves road; and maps showing the location of the Boranup forest which is north west of Augusta. One photo shows the proximity between the forest and Augusta.
- Photos 5 to 7 show piles of old karri hardwood logs remaining after forest harvesting by thinning trees for the State electricity Commission for use as power transmission poles. This operation ceased in the early 1970's. The photos give absolute proof that the area has not been burnt since then.
- Photos 8 to 11 show examples of the massive build up of leaves, bark, undergrowth and other combustible material that has built-up over the years. I was the Forests Department Division Manager at Busselton from 1969. While some prescribed burning was done during that time, the large majority had not. This means that the majority of the area covered by the management plan has not been burnt or had other hazard reduction measures for at least 50 years.
- Photos 12 to 14 show examples of the poor state of access in the forest. even the only road (Boranup Drive) where tourists may gain access has not been graded for months. Side tracks are not maintained. a practise that is actually encouraged in the management plan.

North east to north west winds are the most dangerous fire-fighters have to contend with in WA. Such winds also are also a portent for dry lightning strikes that were the cause of the Waroona, Dwellingup 1961 and many other major bushfires.

Imagine a scenario that such a bushfire started in the north section of Boranup on a north west wind taking it south east towards Karridale and Augusta. Then the wind changes to a strong south westerly sea breeze which is highly likely. This then creates a new head fire travelling north east towards Witchcliffe and onwards to Margaret River and the vineyards worth billions of dollars.

This could happen at any time during the "fire season".

In concluding my remarks on the dire situation at Boranup may I stress that my remarks are designed to raise awareness of the problems the state faces in mitigation of the overall fire situation in WA. In addressing the need for

further reform, the example I have chosen highlights the problems we all face today

### **Proposed Legislative; Policy; or Function Reforms and Emergency Management Procedures**

- The two statutory bodies charged with the responsibilities of advising the State Government on proposed legislation for all matters regarding National Parks and Nature Reserves on one hand ; and State Forests on the other are the Conservation Commission and the Forest Products Commission respectively. Fire management matters in all its forms are the subject of the present Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona fire. . It is imperative therefore that both agencies act in a collaborative manner at all times. This may already be happening. Nevertheless , it is considered the three management plans studied in preparing this submission do not give sufficient weight to integrating fire into the contents of the plans , and a top down review is warranted
- Review and amend the Bushfires Act where necessary to ensure that there is consistency between activities of all land owners and land managers , including a requirement that the Department of Parks and Wildlife complies in all respects with the Act
- Strengthen or create a single body such as a revamped Department of Fire and Emergency Services as an overarching organisation charged with responsibility for all matters pertaining to fire management in WA
- Ensure that the situation which was allowed to happen at the Waroona fire where responsibility for the control of the fire was transferred between the two agencies during the progress of the fire is never repeated . It left DFES in an untenable position
- Recognise that fires do not respect lines on maps which indicate tenure , administrative or planning boundaries . Responsibility rests with managers to liaise with their neighbours even within the same department when planning activities, particularly with respect to Bush-fire Management. If necessary develop guidelines for this to occur
- Ensure that people having the necessary qualifications and experience in fire management are recruited. by the relevant management agencies so that fire management receives adequate attention and becomes integrated with the primary legislative or management objective of each organisation , both public and private
- Promulgate regulations and ensure functional reforms of management agencies comply with such regulations which should cover forests, agricultural private property and vacant crown land

- Encourage and if necessary regulate to give greater recognition and support to the valuable contribution and essential support given by voluntary bushfire brigades
- Recognise that individual local authorities control the activities of bushfire brigades. Standards and finance provided vary between councils. Establish a code of conduct or similar to ensure that all councils meet a minimum standard of training and functional operation of brigades.
- Review the Emergency Services Levy imposed by local Councils to ensure a fixed proportion is dedicated to remediation regarding Fire management and control. Standardise the amount and use of the Levy between Local Government councils. Spread the load between all sections of the community even if increases are necessary
- Enhance the use of supplementary manpower of industries working in or near forests. Mining, forestry and even individual neighbours collectively control a large resource base of people and equipment . Compile a register of this recourse and ensure that those acting in accordance with Government contracts are required to give their employees a basic level of fire training including safety
- Include such resources in fire management plans,: ensure safety standards under Work Safe requirements are maintained at all times ; ensure insurance policies cover all activities of supplementary manpower and equipment
- Require that the Department of Parks and Wildlife immediately develop management guidelines such that supplementary forces close by can enter national parks immediately a fire is detected. often as a first line of attack
- Recognise that changing weather conditions have a vital role to play in fire behaviour and functions must be capable of changes at short notice For example .the Waroona fire started during the night when dry thunderstorms were occurring , but from radio reports was not reported until 7.25 am even though sun rise was about 5.45 am . Perhaps aerial detection schedules need review so detection could have commenced earlier
- Remember the Royal Commission conducted by G J Roger following the 1961 Dwellingup fires which led to the abandonment of the then current policy of fire suppression once a fire started mostly in heavy fuels, in favour of broad acre prescribed burning and the construction of firebreaks and tracks from which to burn and also contain outbreaks. This policy stood the test of time for nearly 50 years . until the implementation in about 2000 of the current policy caught up with managers 10 years later
- Understand review and where necessary reform current fire control practices and techniques . It is axiomatic that the less fuel there is to burn , the easier a bushfire is to put out. Secondly separate a fire from

most effective in some situations, but are limited in others particularly at night

- Publicise widely the final recommendations of the well qualified the fuel, by constructing and maintaining tracks often months or years before a fire event This must be the first priority of the Department of Parks and Wildlife to plan and implement forthwith and accelerate in Utilise all modern techniques available by selecting the method most appropriate for the then current situation. For example water bombers are Special Inquirer Mr Euan Fergusuon. Use all media outlets available . It must be recognised that there are a relatively small section of our community who will always oppose disturbance of any kind to our unique natural environment . As part of the "sales campaign" there is a need to select as presenters people who are recognised as conservationists by the community

Photos showing condition of Boranup Forest

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11

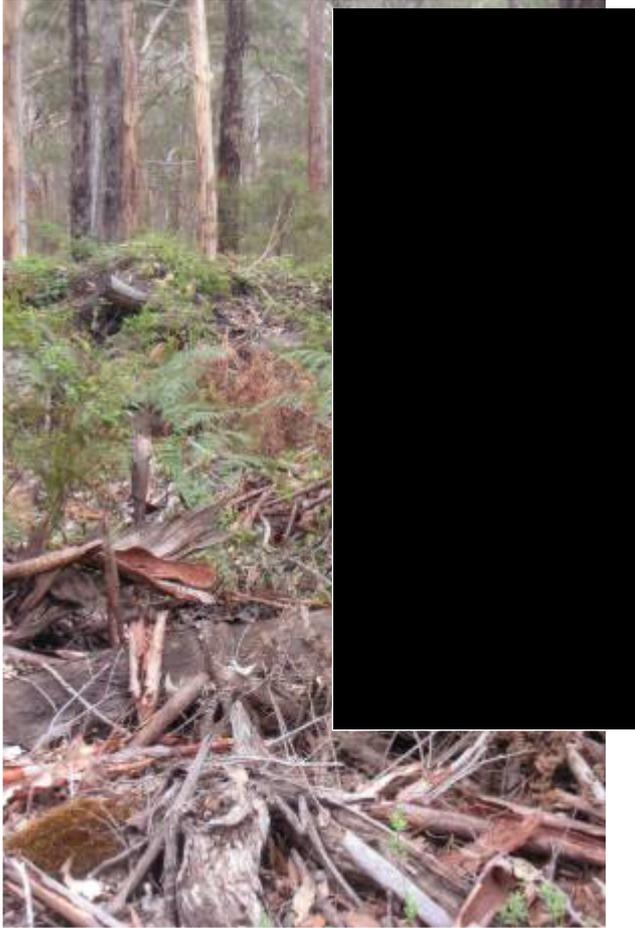


Photo 12



Photo 13



APPENDIX TWO  
**RESUMÉ**



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**ADDRESS** : 

**TELEPHONE** : 

**DATE OF BIRTH** : 

**QUALIFICATIONS** : **BSc.For. (UWA)**  
**Dip.For. (AFS)**

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**SUMMARY OF EMPLOYMENT**

1958 FORESTRY TRAINEE  
*Forests Department of Western Australia*

1959 – 1962 UNIVERSITY STUDENT  
*University of Western Australia*  
*Australian Forestry School, Canberra*

1963 – 1976 FIELD OFFICER  
*Forests Department of Western Australia*  
Five forest districts in Western Australia including District Manager in three districts (karri, jarrah and pine).

1977 – 1980 REGIONAL LEADER  
*Forests Department of Western Australia*  
Forest operations Central Region, Bunbury

1981 – 1983 TIMBER PROCUREMENT OFFICER  
*Forests Department of Western Australia*  
Head office, Perth

1984 – 1985 REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT  
*Forests Department of Western Australia*  
Southern Region, Manjimup

1985 – 1987 MANAGER, TIMBER PRODUCTION BRANCH  
*Department of Conservation and Land Management*  
Head office, Perth

1988 - 1990 DIVISIONAL MANAGER, FOREST RESOURCES  
*Department of Conservation and Land Management*  
Head office, Perth

1991 - 1999 DIRECTOR OF FORESTS  
*Department of Conservation and Land Management*  
Head office, Perth

## **SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE**

### **MANAGEMENT OF PLANTATIONS**

- ❖ Direct field control of softwood plantation establishment, maintenance and management of an annual programme of up to 2000 ha.
- ❖ Preparing, managing and directing the preparation of annual work programmes and periodical management plans for softwood and hardwood plantation development in Western Australia.
- ❖ Directing the preparation of operational guidelines, manuals of procedure and plantation codes of practice.
- ❖ Negotiating the adoption of the Plantation Code of Practice with Commonwealth officials, other State Government departments and local authorities in Western Australia.
- ❖ Developing timber share farming agreements by profit a prendre with land owners; acting as manager of 3 overseas consortiums with a target area of 50 000 ha (30 000 ha currently established). This initiative has facilitated the planting of over 100 000 ha of bluegum plantations in South Western Australia in the last 10 years by the private sector.
- ❖ Control and direction of a plant propagation centre in Western Australia with an existing capacity of 30 M tree seedlings per annum with a potential capacity of 60 M. Methods used include use of controlled pollinated seeds and micro cuttings where appropriate. Major species include *Euc diversicolor* (Karri), *P radiata*, *P pinaster* (Maritime Pine) and *Euc globulus* (Tasmanian Bluegum).
- ❖ Participation in the development of tropical forestry in the Kimberley including commercial development of Indian sandalwood (*Santalum alba*).

### **MANAGEMENT OF NATIVE HARDWOOD FORESTS**

- ❖ Approval of silvicultural guidelines for regeneration and management of Western Australia's native forests.
- ❖ Development of timber strategy for the management of commercial forestry activities in Western Australia.
- ❖ Participation in the preparation of forest management plans for Western Australia's native forests.
- ❖ Control of management of West Australian sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*) in the low rainfall areas.
- ❖ Development of policies for control of forest diseases and pests including jarrah dieback disease (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*).

### **ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT (ESFM)**

- ❖ Directing the monitoring of compliance by forest practitioners of forest management plans, departmental policies and operational guidelines.
- ❖ Participation in the development of environmental management systems for native forests and plantations.
- ❖ Development of environmental auditing systems based on the Montreal criteria and regional indicators leading to the development of an Australian standard for ESFM.

### **TIMBER HARVESTING**

- ❖ Control of supervision in the field of contractors' timber harvesting activities in native forests and plantations including adherence to prescriptions, safety standards and production targets.
- ❖ Preparing public tenders for timber harvesting activities.
- ❖ Evaluating, awarding and directing tenders and contracts with an annual value of \$100 M.

### **FIRE CONTROL**

- ❖ Controller of large fire organisations to contain wildfires on public and private land.
- ❖ Liaison with local authorities and volunteer fire control organisations to develop contingency plans for fire emergencies.
- ❖ Co-ordination of decision making organisations in fire control matters in the South West of Western Australia.

### **NATIONAL FOREST POLICY ISSUES**

- ❖ Deputy for the Executive Director of the Department on the Standing Committee of Forestry (SCF), being the permanent heads of State Forest Services and the Commonwealth which recommends forest policy to Commonwealth and State Government ministers.
- ❖ Chairman of the Private Forestry Consultative Committee (PFCC), being a subcommittee of SCF, the membership of which includes nominees of peak organisations representing private forestry interests in Australia and government representatives. The PFCC is a means by which the private sector provides input in the development of forest policy for Australia.
- ❖ Guidance to the PFCC which has carriage of the implementation of Vision 2020, a Commonwealth Government initiative endorsed by the States which aims to treble the plantation area in Australia from 1 M to 3 M ha by the Year 2020.

### **POLITICAL ADVICE**

- ❖ Preparing draft responses to Ministerial queries and parliamentary questions.
- ❖ Providing technical or financial information to the Minister and parliamentary subcommittees.
- ❖ Provision of input into drafting of legislative programmes and forest management regulations.

### **BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

- ❖ Implementation of government directives to establish semi-autonomous business units within the aegis of the department.
- ❖ Approval of business plans prepared by the managers of the various business units.
- ❖ Responsibility for setting performance indicators and financial outcomes to be achieved by business units.
- ❖ Control of forest resources financial management involving sales of timber from native forests and softwood and hardwood plantations with a total annual value of \$200 M. Control of expenditure to regenerate native forests and establish and manage hardwood and softwood plantations.

## **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

- ❖ Chief departmental representative in the negotiations with trade unions on Enterprise Bargaining Agreements.
- ❖ Development of Workplace Agreements with staff under control.

## **INDUSTRIAL SAFETY**

- ❖ Direct control of industrial safety programmes in field situations involving up to 150 employees engaged in forest field operations, fire control, forest harvesting and saw milling operations.
- ❖ Direction of safety performance of overall forest resources programmes including over 50 private contracting companies employing up to 1000 people.
- ❖ Previously Controlling Officer of the Timber Industry Regulation Act including recommending policy initiatives, accident reporting and accident investigation of the forest industries in Western Australia.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ph [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Mr Euan Ferguson  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

### **Re. Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry**

Dear Mr Ferguson

Please accept this as my written submission to record my input into this inquiry. I write this in my capacity as the Fire Control Officer for the Coolup Volunteer Bushfire Brigade and also as a private landowner.

In your terms of reference 1 (d) I comment:

I would like to start by saying we are 55 years on from the devastating Dwellingup fire and we are going backwards. We have so much more in the way of state of the art resources yet were unable to contain this fire to the scarp. I believe more emphasis needs to be placed on being proactive rather than reactive. If we can't be proactive and do our hazard reduction burns prior to summer, then we need to be proactive in fighting the fire and not waiting for it to come to us. This would require us to revisit the practice of back burning which seems in the litigious nature of our lives to have been put away as a dangerous practice. I'm not sure how much more dangerous it can be when there is a monstrous fire like this that we can't control.

The central power struggle that there appears to be between our professional fire agencies and the volunteer firefighters is what is breaking down the ability of local people being able to fight for and save their communities. My brigade had sent a truck to Yarloop on the day that Yarloop burnt, they were there for a short time and then told by our CBFCO to return to their station as they were not requested through the proper means. We also had trucks go down and wait for more than an hour to be tasked. I had numerous phone calls from distressed firefighters to vent their disappointment about being so close, being available and having some local knowledge, but were not activated. On Wednesday night a steady stream of fire trucks raced down the South West Hwy past our station while our 3 trucks stayed inside 1 of which was a 15000lt bulk tanker, what a wasted resource. I was fighting the fire on private farming property in Wagerup with my own equipment as our brigade was not being activated. I was allowed through the road block at Pinjarra because I have FCO

identification on my vehicle, there were several other private appliances at the road block that were not allowed through. One unit in particular I told the police needed to come with me, he was a worker on the farm that I was going to fight the fire at. The whole time we were fighting this fire I never saw a firetruck. I did see a Sector Commander once at which point I told him we needed help, but he had no units to spare. I have heard it said on several occasions that farmers are not required and they are not welcome to help at these incidents, from my experience at this latest incident farmers that have all the local knowledge and equipment to assist were stopped at road blocks. It is often said that because farmers aren't trained to fight fires that they are a danger to themselves and others. I would like to refute this by saying, the landowners know their land, many times I have seen firefighters through no fault of their own trapped by drains, fences, bush lines etc, they did not have the local knowledge. I am most certainly and advocate for allowing properly prepared private units on the fire ground, it is a resource that is invaluable and cost effective.

Following the 2007 Dwellingup/Coolup fire the Shire of Murray had a community meeting where this was discussed. It was resolved that landowners could register with the shire and be issued with some identification to allow them through road blocks.....we are still waiting.

The placement of road blocks needs urgent review. The South West Hwy was blocked just south of Pinjarra, I understand that traffic needed to be notified of the restriction to traffic in Waroona so they could divert, especially heavy vehicles. I do not think it was necessary to have it guarded by traffic management personnel **and** police. This road block was so far north of the fire that it cut off a large part of the Murray Shire that was not even under a bushfire "advice" level warning. This is not only ridiculous it then turns law abiding citizens into people trying to find ways around the law. The road blocks seem to have no discretion about who they let through. I had calls from the owner of the privately owned airfield (Our brigade supports the refilling of aircraft) that fuel and water tankers trying to reach the airfield to supply the water bombing aircraft were stopped for hours. The airfield they were trying to reach was in the Murray Shire and not under any form of alert. We are constantly reminded that we should prepare of properties, however if you are not able to reach your well prepared property then you have wasted your time, because as we know from this incident there were not enough fire trucks or they are unsuitable (urban pumpers can't go in paddocks) to defend everything and we also know that farming properties are deemed less important than settlement areas. So if landowners aren't able to defend their interests then who will.

In your terms of reference 1 (h) I comment:

Because such a large portion of the Murray Shire was restricted for such an extended time, many landowners faced animal welfare issues, they were not able to check their stock. Once they had left their properties, for fuel, bread, milk etc they were not allowed back in. Let's not forget this area was not under any form of alert. I have a block that is separate from my home property with 50 cattle on it. My home property was not in the restricted area,

however my other block was, if I didn't have my FCO identification I would not have been able to check them. Had they run out of water then they would have died.

Finally I have the utmost respect for the volunteers in all the various emergency services, I am one, they are tremendous people who do their best. What we need is to dissolve this centralised power hungry bunch that have no real knowledge of fighting bushfires. We need to allow people who know about fighting bushfires in their area to be allowed to control the incident without the interference and pressure that gets applied from these so called professionals. The lack of accountability and recognition of the systemic problem by the people at the top of the DFES tree is inconceivable and if things don't change then I fear there will be total disengagement with the volunteers and landowners, but worst of all if the whole structure and bureaucracy of prevention and firefighting doesn't change then we may as well circle the next town to be erased from the map and see how many people have to die as a result.

Thank you for undertaking this inquiry, I look forward to some significant changes for the better. I am happy to clarify any points or give evidence in either capacity at a public or private inquiry if so required.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Ph [REDACTED]  
Email [REDACTED]

Mr Euan Ferguson  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

### **Re. Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry**

Dear Mr Ferguson

Please accept this as my written submission to record my input into this inquiry.

In your terms of reference 1 (d) I comment:

I remember the Dwellingup bushfire in 1961 which devastated Dwellingup, back then the only firefighting agency was the Forestry Dept. which had very limited resources, they were assisted by rural landowners who likewise had very primitive equipment eg, knapsacks, rakes, shovels, wet rags and a box of matches (which of course enabled them to fight fire with fire). What they were successful in was containing this fire to the scarp. 55 years on and millions of dollars spent on firefighting equipment, radio communications, aerial suppression etc and not to mention the ability to gain semi reliable weather forecasts for the coming days, however we witnessed a first in my time where a fire managed to make its way from the scarp to the sea. I believe more emphasis needs to be placed on being proactive rather than reactive. If we can't be proactive and do our hazard reduction burns prior to summer, then we need to be proactive in fighting the fire and not waiting for it to come to us.

The central power struggle that there appears to be between our professional fire agencies and the volunteer firefighters is what is breaking down the ability of local people being able to fight for and save their communities. I have heard it said on more occasions than I care to remember that farmers are not only not required they are not welcome to help at these incidents, from my experience at this latest incident farmers that have all the local knowledge and equipment to assist were stopped at road blocks. It is often said that because farmers aren't trained to fight fires that they are a danger to themselves and others. I would like to refute this by saying, the landowners know their land, many times I have seen firefighters through no fault of their own trapped by drains, fences, bush lines etc, they did not have the local knowledge.

The placement of road blocks needs urgent review. The South West Hwy was blocked just south of Pinjarra, I understand that traffic needed to be notified of the restriction to traffic in Waroona so they could divert, especially heavy vehicles. I do not think it was necessary to have it guarded by traffic management personnel and police. This road block was so far north of the fire that it cut off a large part of the Murray Shire that was not even under a bushfire "advice" level warning. This is not only ridiculous it then turns law abiding citizens into people trying to find ways around the law. The road blocks seem to have no discretion about who they let through, there were fuel and water tankers trying to reach the airfield to supply the water bombing aircraft stopped for hours, the airfield they were trying to reach was in the Murray Shire and not under any form of alert. We are constantly reminded that we should prepare our properties, however if you are not able to reach your well prepared property then you have wasted your time, because as we know from this incident there were not enough fire trucks or they are unsuitable (urban pumpers can't go in paddocks) to defend everything and we also know that farming properties are deemed less important than settlement areas. So if we aren't able to defend our interests then who will.

In your terms of reference 1 (h) I comment:

Because such a large portion of the Murray Shire was restricted for such an extended time, many landowners faced animal welfare issues, they were not able to check their stock. Once they had left their properties, for fuel, bread, milk etc they were not allowed back in. Let's not forget this area was not under any form of alert.

I closing I would like to say that all of the people on the ground fighting the fires did their job to the best of their ability and within the significant restraints placed on them by our bureaucracy. The urban firefighters are very good at what they do protecting infrastructure, I would like farmers to have the opportunity to do what they know and that is protect theirs and their neighbours interests and support the volunteer bush firefighters.

Thank you for undertaking this inquiry, I look forward to some significant changes for the better. I would be happy to discuss any matters which may need clarification.

Yours sincerely



## **Submission to the Public Inquiry into January 2016 Waroona Fire Addressing Term of Reference 3. The need for further reform.**

**Author:** [REDACTED]

**Telephone:** [REDACTED]

**Email:** [REDACTED]

### **Past bushfire experience:**

I came to Australia from Zambia in 1968, and joined the then Forests Department as a Forest Workman. I was involved in prescribed burning, and fighting wildfires in karri country, including the big fire around Boorara Tower in 1969. In that year I joined the bushfire research section at Manjimup, under the direction of George Peet OAM, and Mr Ric Sneeuwjagt. We lit, observed, and suppressed over a hundred experimental fires in karri forest, and pine plantations in the south-west. We sampled litter fuel depths, and recorded rate of fire spread, flame height, and flame angle.

I helped in the analysis of the results, being at that time engaged in distance education in mathematics through the then WAIT (now Curtin University). The results were published in the “Red Book”, known to most West Australian firefighters. It was very clear that, even in summer, burning in light fuels led to mild fires, easily suppressed, Burning in heavier fuels led to fierce fires, harder to suppress. I also informally observed the response of the vegetation to fire and smoke, and noted the beneficial effects in the first winter after the fire, including resprouting of zamias, grasstrees, and an abundance of wildflowers. The *karri* forest was obviously healthier after fire. I had seen a similar beneficial effect in African savannah, after the frequent grassfires set by Africans for hunting, to stimulate grass growth, and reduce ticks and tse-tse flies.

I have since served as a volunteer in the Roleystone Bushfire Brigade, officered by Noel Plowman and Robbie Van Uden, and attended several courses at the Belmont academy. Having moved to Bridgetown, I am now in the Bridgetown Volunteers, in a support role.

### **Academic Qualifications:**

I completed a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and biology at WAIT, then a Master’s degree in Human Ecology at Brussels University. After retiring, as a Senior Research Scientist, from the former Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), I completed a PhD in Landscape Ecology at Curtin University. My thesis addressed the matter of bushfire in Wungong Catchment, just south of Perth. The thesis is publicly available, just search on (ward+wungong+fire).

### **Nyoongars Knew Best:**

Throughout my research, I remained interested in bushfire behaviour, history, and ecology. From my time in Africa, I am aware that humans can play a large role in shaping landscape, by use of fire. I have been stimulated by the books on Australian fire history by Professor Stephen Pyne, of Arizona (Burning Bush), Dr Sylvia Hallam (Fire & Hearth), and Professor Bill Gammage.

In 1995, whilst in CALM, I found that old grasstree stems have clear past fire marks, some going back to 1750, well before European settlement. I have published some of these findings, including an article with Ric Sneeuwjagt in CALM's (now DPAW's) magazine, *Landscape*. Although there has been a co-ordinated campaign to discredit this research, the *jarrah* forest, beyond any doubt, burnt at a general interval of three to four years, that is to say in the fire season between three and four winters after the previous fire. The *jarrah* forest will not carry fire sooner than that, and fires at that interval would automatically be patchy, with many refuges left for plants and animals. Leaving *jarrah* forest unburnt for even five or six years will reduce the number of refuges. When fire is withheld, or prevented, for decades, the eventual fire does a great deal of damage, with mature trees killed outright, refuges abolished, and many native animals trapped and killed by the radiant heat, smoke, and flames. Large balls of burning gas can form in the forest canopy. Fire fighters compare such fires with the city of Hiroshima.

I have talked to many *Nyoongar* Elders about my grasstree findings, and they confirm that traditional burning in the *jarrah* forest was carried out at three to four year intervals, mostly along creek banks, from whence it would spread uphill. Sometimes they would only burn one side of the creek, so leaving refuge on the other. Hunters would hide behind the large *jarrah* trees at the top, and spear the fleeing kangaroos. There is an old painting from the Eastern States, which shows exactly that method being used at the time of early European arrival. There were other hunting techniques used by women, for example burning grass patches for bandicoots and bush rats.

In determining bushfire policy, it is essential that all this human information be taken into account. To fail to do so leads to ecomythology, sometimes arrived at by "science". For example, some botanists have estimated the "juvenile periods" for some plants, that is to say the time needed after a fire to set seed. They falsely assume that all such plants are inevitably killed by fire. They then multiply this period by a factor of their own choosing (3,5,10 etc.) and say that if an area is burnt more often, all these plants will be wiped out. This claim has appeared in a number of refereed papers, and seems to impress some botanists, politicians and policy makers, yet it is nonsense. Anyone with actual experience of fire will know that the lighter the fuel, the more patchy a fire will be, so offering more refuges. Not all plants will be burnt. Complete destruction of vegetation only occurs following long exclusion of fire.

Some recent research by Dr Neil Burrows, and Mr Ted Middleton, of DPAW, has shown that a south coast *Banksia* species actually increased fourfold after a number of short interval fires, whereas some botanists and environmentalists, using the false "juvenile period" theory, would have predicted its demise.

There is much more evidence on the merits of *Nyoongar* burning, but it is presented in a lengthy thesis, which few have the stamina to read. Above, I have explained how to access the thesis. It is up to individuals whether they consult it. I do not want to appear before a committee to give oral evidence. I will leave that to the histrionic abilities of some renowned academics and environmentalists. It is important that any such committee probes the qualifications of witnesses who offer opinions on bushfire. The possession of a doctorate is only relevant if it is about bushfire behaviour, ecology, or history. A doctorate in, say, medieval French literature, whilst a fine achievement, is irrelevant to bushfire.

This inquiry should break new ground by interviewing *Nyoongar* Elders. I will not mention names, because some of my informants may have passed away since I spoke to them. A list of respected Elders should be available from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The continued quasi-military approach to fire simply does not work. The Americans, with vast budgets, have tried it, and failed. It is time to think again, and use the fire knowledge of the Aboriginal people. Until we do, we will fail repeatedly, with fires getting worse and worse, and the vegetation more mutilated.

**-oOo-**



PHONE: 

**Subject: Submission pertaining to the Public Enquiry Into January 2016 Waroona Fire.**

1.

**(a) The effectiveness of bushfire pre-incidence was lacking and failed to be applied in this instance.** The fire started in an area known to be of risk of fire as happened on 31/1/15 at Lane Pool, the area should have had continuous monitoring during the busy holiday period. I understood that there would be a Parks and Wildlife Officer at the camping area or a ranger in recognition of previous fire events in the Lane Pool camping areas.

**(b) Previous enquiries into bushfires in WA have not appeared as having the desired outcome given the results of the 2016 Waroona/Yarloop bushfire.** The effectiveness of plans and procedures were considered with future modifications from the last enquiry do not appear to have improved the overall effectiveness. I presume any amendments via the outcomes of enquiries re procedures/plans to better manage bushfires were instigated for the safety of all concerned, otherwise the fire enquires were an embarrassment for the persons who was in the position to enforce those amended procedures/plans.

**(c) Effectiveness of suppressing the bush fire was at the original source of Lane Pool, this did not happen.** There is conjecture as why this did not occur hence the loss of 2 lives and 180 homes/properties. Hopefully the reason will be addressed at the inquiry. At 1(a) I mention that there should have been someone in authority at Lane Pool at the time of the fire with appropriate knowledge re bushfires to ensure that the emergency was reported as soon as possible per laid down procedures.

**(d) Effectiveness of management of the fire noted at (c) will overlap with the effectiveness of suppressing the fire.** Management being interlinked requires efficiency and management of communications and coordination. It appears that there were problems with communications and coordination during the 2016 Waroona /Yarloop bushfire. There are many agencies involved in a fire of this enormity, essential services, local, state and interstate governments which calls for dependency on each other, so management have to get it right for the safety and well being of all concerned. This also includes the public who have to know what to do in a dangerous fire situation, again wholly reliant on communications.

**(e) Maintaining essential services, again interlinked with 1(d) coordination.** One of the first items to fail was electricity, a main transformer was burnt, Telstra 3G phones system was out. The local fire brigade was standing by waiting for information from Parks and Wildlife re the fire situation. Myself, wife, son and grandson needed information from local government at the Memorial Hall re stay or leave town. The local government were waiting for information to pass on to public. The Shire CE.O said go to the Waroona Resource Centre, as the memorial hall which was not air conditioned and further from the smoke.

**(f) Mention has been made re communications at 1(d) and 1(e) due to there being links to communications under those headings. The subject of emergency warnings was wanting from my viewpoint re Waroona.**

**(g) Effectiveness/management of people affected by the fire.**

- (i) Evacuation procedures were vague.
- (ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire were lacking.
- (iii) Provision of welfare support was well organised at Pinjarra evacuation centre. Welfare support for our family situation was minimal up and until evacuation to Pinjarra.
- (iv) Management of people wanting to return to their properties in Waroona was nonexistence. It was a word of mouth situation as to what was happening, as once you left Waroona you could not return, so information in that respect was hearsay.

**(h) Livestock and companion animal management and welfare issues.**

I am aware that there were again problems with persons moving animals for their safety and feeding, with bureaucracy insisting that permits were required to do so!! The problem being the fire was so fast moving that the permit bureaucracy couldn't match the speed of the fire!!

2.

**Lessons learned from previous bushfires emergencies.**

(a) The extent to which the findings and recommendations of previous bushfire reviews undertaken since 2011 have been implemented. I am not in a position where reading the contents of 2 x Reviews, 2 x Reports, 1 x Special Enquiry and 1 x Post Incident Analysis on previous bushfires would change my memories or thoughts on the 2016 Waroona/Yarloop disastrous bushfires. Have the persons whose responsibility to implement and authorise the outcome of the Reviews, Reports, Special Enquires and Post Incident Analysis regarding previous bushfires done their job? Have the persons responsible to authorise the recommendations re the bushfires failed somewhere in the communications line of authority? Was State Government funding a factor that impeded the introduction of said recommendations?

**(b) The effectiveness of reforms implemented by the WA State Government since 2011 to mitigate all bushfires (not just major bushfires as suggested in the terms of reference).** At (a) above and Lessons Learned I mentioned recommendations and implementation re the outcomes from numerous bushfires investigations. Only persons in authority know what was actually implemented by legislative policy re bushfires. The legislative level of WA State Government should be in print so will be available to the committee of the Public Enquiry Into January 2016 Waroona Fire. The effectiveness of reforms have to be questioned when 2 men were burnt to death, 180 buildings were destroyed, including 160 homes and 72,000ha of valuable land burnt, also businesses effected and a complete town destroyed. The worst bushfire since Dwellingup was razed to the ground.

### **3. The need for further reform.**

The need for further reform is blatantly clear considering the overall negative outcome of the bushfire statistics as mentioned at 2 (b) above.

### **Conclusion.**

The Lane Pool camping area is a known fire risk, was this recognised in this instance? Considering a similar Waroona bushfire occurred on the 31/1/2015 at Lane Pool and the Waroona bushfire started on 6/1/16 at Lane Pool, both stated by authorities as started by lightning strikes.

Can the cause of the Waroona fire started on 6/1/16 be confirmed by independent evidence at the Public Enquiry. It could be more than just coincidence the 2 fires having similar locations and similar ways of ignition. The area of ignition Lane Pool is a frequented camping ground (as previously mentioned) and January is a favourite period for camping, hence as I remember that there would be a Parks and Wildlife presence at high usage times in the Lane Pool area. Safety and control of the camping ground and surround should be paramount in January. There is a question re lightning on both occasions as it is known that during a certain condition of the fire it will have the ability to generate its own lightning.

I would like to state that at no time do I detract in this submission the fact that everyone involved with the massive task of fighting the Waroona and Yarloop bushfire in all areas of actual fire and support in any way did so with the best of their abilities. Without the dedication of all concerned there is little doubt that the outcome of the fire could easily have been more than just one town destroyed.

Regards



Wednesday, 2 March 2016

Mr Euan Ferguson, AFSM  
Special Inquirer  
Waroona Bushfire  
Via Email: [WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Ferguson

Re: Submission to Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the special inquiry into the Waroona Bushfire. I have been a resident of Harvey for the past 23 years and previously lived in Pemberton and Dwellingup. The recent fires came to within five kilometres of my home.

The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities:

In February 1988 I was working as an office assistant at the Dwellingup office of Conservation and Land Management (later Department of Parks & Wildlife) when a fire started in the forest almost exactly where the Waroona fire started this year. It was one of the biggest fires seen in the northern Jarrah forest since the 1961 Dwellingup fire; it burnt 1500 hectares. In 1988, that was a big fire; now we are regularly experiencing fires in excess of 40 000 hectares. What has changed? The forests are the same, the hot dry summers and mild wet winters are the same. We have more equipment and technology than ever to fight these fires and yet we are still experiencing massive fires.

After the 1961 Dwellingup fire, a Royal Commission recommended “the Forests Department make every endeavour to improve and extend the practice of control burning to ensure the forests receive the maximum protection practicable consistent with silvicultural requirements”.

From 1961 until about 1986, controlled burns were carried out in the forest and around towns. Fire needs three things to burn: oxygen, heat and fuel. If one of those three things is removed, it cannot burn. Fuel is the easiest of the three to tackle. Controlled burns can be done cost effectively via aerial burning. Controlled burning also provides training for inexperienced fire-fighters and acts as a refresher for the more experienced.

Twenty five years ago we bought our block in a new subdivision. My partner and I, both being bush-fire aware, noted that there was only one road into the subdivision and therefore one road out. In the event of a fire, everyone would need to leave in a westerly direction via this one road, as the road to the east leads straight into bush. Our block is also on the foothills with a forested reserve adjacent.

Prior to 2000, we observed the neighbouring farmers burning the roadsides every year which kept the fuel loads under control and DP&W control burnt the reserve. The roadside burning has now ceased and no fuel reduction has occurred for several years. We now have the situation where farmers are not authorised to burn road verges to protect their properties, which leaves everyone in our subdivision more vulnerable to bushfire. In the event the road verge being alight at the same time as residents were evacuating the subdivision, it is likely to pose a threat of entrapment

or at least panic as motorists endeavour to flee along this sole access road. The adjacent reserve hasn't been burnt for around 20 years and is to the north of the subdivision, so it poses a significant threat.

Although we have all these systems in place, there is a definite lack of cohesive plans that result in fuel reduction on public lands that are outside of the control of DP&W. When considering the significant resources including trucks, people, fire stations and training that exist within rural WA, it is unfathomable that little or no fuel reduction burning takes place by any agency other than DP&W. The formation of a rural fire authority that can combine DFES' country operations and local government resources appears to be essential. This should be planned by government using the existing emergency services levy that currently does not achieve any level of fuel reduction in rural WA but relies solely on suppression response mechanisms which are increasingly being seen to fail.

(ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire

Our house plans included several strategies to make it resistant to ember attack in the event of a bush fire and to enable us to "stay and defend" our home. We had the opportunity to put this into practice during the Waroona fire and when we received the emergency warnings we decided stay and defend. Once we made this decision, it appeared we were on our own. We had no access to information that would have helped us plan our tasks. For example, we had no idea how close the fire was to us. We watered down our house periodically for three days, as did the neighbours who stayed, and consequently emptied the water tank that supplies the subdivision. This could have been avoided if we had access to a map showing the proximity of the fire, the direction it was predicted to take and spot forecasts showing the forecasted winds. This information would have helped us gauge the likelihood of the fire impacting our home and directed us to the best way to use our time in the lead up to any ember attack. In hindsight, we realised that actively watering was only required on one afternoon of the four-day fire event.

In this case, improved systems of providing information to residents who stay and defend would greatly reduce uncertainty and enable improvements in efficient implementation of fire plans by residents. These should include access to incident control maps and spot forecasts.

I hope this inquiry will have some impact and prevent another tragedy occurring and that my grandparents' complete loss in 1961 won't be in vain. My mother still cannot put large pieces of wood on her wood-burning fire, and she is terrified driving through the forest, especially during summer. Family friends from Dwellingup were traumatised after driving through Yarloop recently. Fifty-five years after the event, the scars are still evident. You can't put a price on this kind of suffering.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

██████████

2 March 2016



[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
Mobile: [Redacted]  
Email: [Redacted]

29<sup>th</sup> February 2016

[WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au)

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Sir / Madam,

We are writing to provide feedback on the management of recent fires affecting our region in the South West. My husband and I have been impacted by not only the devastating Waroona / Yarloop fires, but also the Uduc fire reported on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2016. Our concerns apply to the handling of both fires, but our responses are based only on our experiences during the Waroona / Yarloop fire.

We have read the Terms of Service and will provide feedback, where applicable, based on our personal experiences.

Before progressing, there are some key points to note regarding our personal situation that may provide some perspective in relation to our responses:

1. We are located in Uduc on 50 acres consisting of part grazing / part seasonal wetland (currently dry);
2. We have just completed building our home and moved in 3 months ago;
3. The area surrounding our home consists of some green grass and builders sand;
4. During the time we have owned the property we have actively maintained fire breaks around the perimeter of the property as well as around key portions of the grazing paddocks and seasonal wetland areas;
5. We have also undertaken a ground burn of an existing plantation area with the assistance of our local volunteer fire brigade - this was to reduce the amount of fuel under the plantation trees but can only be undertaken during favourable winter conditions;
6. Our Bushfire Survival Plan is to stay and actively defend our property and we have utilised the checklists and plan provided by DFES;



7. We have the equipment and resources to stay and actively defend our property (including our own water supply, petrol operated fire tender, fire retardant clothing, generator, food supplies etc);
8. We had an evacuation plan in place and ready should it be required; and
9. We have only responded to the specific Terms of Reference that we felt we could provide informed and constructive comments to and have provided examples and suggested improvements where possible.

We would like to take a moment to thank the emergency services teams, career and volunteer, on the ground and in the air, who, along with my husband and our neighbour, assisted us with our fire-fighting efforts. We are very grateful for the help we received during a very stressful and exhausting few weeks.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide, what we hope, is valuable and constructive feedback for a procedure that impacts so many lives.

Kind regards,

██████████





## Terms of Reference

### 1. The response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire

- a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities;
- b) The effectiveness of emergency management plans and procedures;
- c) The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire;
- d) The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance;
- e) Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency services organisations and the community;
- f) The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors;

At no stage during or after the fires did we receive an early warning advice or evacuation message for the developing emergency. Being situated in Uduc, we watched from our paddock on the evening of Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January as the fire in the Darling Scarp grew throughout the day. We watched the glow of the fire front move west towards the coast during the night and into the morning. With winds shifting and unfavourable weather conditions predicted, we made our own decision to implement our Bushfire Survival Plan early on the morning of Thursday 7<sup>th</sup>. There was no indication on the DFES Alerts and Warnings page that we were in any danger at this stage, however with what we could see, we felt this situation was likely to change as the day progressed.

*It is worth noting that in the event of future emergencies should we actually receive an alert or text message, given the inaccuracy of information being provided during these fires we would be unlikely to trust the information being delivered to us. If we knew improvements had been made and the information was accurate we would respond accordingly but would never rely solely on a text message or automated warning system.*

Over the course of the next few days the only communication we had was from family and friends outside of the area who, like us, were reliant on the DFES updates and media reporting. Our decision and plan to stay and defend was based on the (incorrect) assumption that we would be able to rely on accurate and timely information to be relayed to us through DFES, and as suggested by the DFES Bushfire Survival checklists, via ABC radio. It became dreadfully clear very early on that this information was neither accurate nor timely in updates and did not reflect the true state of the emergency unfolding on the ground. NB: Although updates were being uploaded to the DFES



website every hour, the fire was progressing much faster than this so the updates were out of date well before they were published online. The updates themselves are timestamped, but the information within the update is not.

We tried various means of obtaining updated information:

1. *Telephoning a Fire Control Officer directly to request an update on the location of the fire front:* before being provided any information we were asked our location. When advised we lived in Uduc we were told we MUST evacuate immediately. After advising the FCO we had a Bushfire Survival Plan in place and were staying to actively defend, along with our neighbours either side, we were again told to evacuate. It was clear that we would not be provided with any further information. We understand that authorities may not support the choice to stay and defend, however it is an option that DFES both advertise and educate property owners on. Officials that take a doom-laden and alarmist approach when dealing with property owners (or their families) that have chosen to stay are being neither helpful or productive and are only generating panic - in an emergency situation this is very dangerous and may cost lives. There seems to be a notion that everyone MUST evacuate. Perhaps further training on how to deal with enquiries from those that choose to stay may assist with ensuring all parties remain calm and information that is both helpful and constructive in nature is communicated properly.
2. *DFES Alerts and Warnings website:* the updates were not accurate in terms of the fire location. Critical information was often not correct ie road names, wind direction and travelling direction of the fire front. Each update was different in format and on a number of occasions, information that was in one update disappeared from the next, only to be added again with the following update (these seemed to be typing omissions rather than changes to fire conditions). Some of the updates were not clear on what had changed, the formatting was confusing (being accessed by a mobile device due to loss of power) and the wording was inconsistent and often hysterical sounding (especially to family members outside of the fire zone). The Waroona Public Information Maps would have been extremely helpful had they been more up-to-date. Often by the time they were posted they were already hours out of date. Where an alert update indicated the direction the fire was travelling, the information was often not useful as it was vague and lacked detail. For example: "The fire is travelling in a south / south easterly direction.". From where exactly? At what speed? What time was this observation made? All these questions are critical to us being able to make decisions around how we protect our property and ensuring our continued safety. Making decisions in any situation, let alone an emergency,



through guess work and assumption is dangerous. The option to stay and defend is openly promoted, to do this we need to be armed with accurate and timely information, we are no different to the crews on the fire front.

3. *Landgate MyFire Website*: we had hoped that with satellite imaging we would have an accurate picture of exactly where the fire front was travelling at any given time, however, even this site was not being updated at regular intervals and often showed no fire in the area at all.
4. *Social Media sites – predominantly Facebook (pages dedicated to fire warnings and updates)*: this became our most reliable source of information, along with what we could actually see and communication with neighbours and owners of surrounding properties.

Not having access to accurate and timely information on the actual location of the fire front proved to be the most frustrating and often most stressful part of the two weeks we spent enduring the Waroona fires. Having planned to stay and actively defend we were reliant on accurate communications to keep us safe. We understand and appreciate there may be limitations to the public messaging systems, however we would expect the information that *is* provided should be accurate and timely. There were occasions during the fire where we could see or were actively fighting a fire front when a DFES update indicated the fire was actually nowhere near our location. Clearly the update being relayed was no longer current or was lacking in additional information.

With the exception of the evening, we could see spotter planes flying high overhead consistently throughout the course of the fire. These spotters must be relaying information in relation to the fire front conditions to ground crews to assist with firefighting efforts. As a resident that had planned to stay and defend, if this information could have been made available to us it would have made a huge difference to our firefighting efforts and general wellbeing during the course of fire (it is extremely stressful not knowing what's happening, and knowing the information being provided is not correct – not just for us, but also for our family and friends).

- g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire:
  - i. Evacuation procedures:

We were not visited by any emergency service departments, Police or Fire, to request we evacuate, nor did we receive any communication to do so.

Although we had chosen to stay and defend, we had an evacuation plan in place and were prepared to evacuate should it become necessary. Within 48 hours of the fire starting we became aware of other farmers who were not able to return to their properties to attend to their stock. As we have livestock and other animals that require food and water, leaving the area for extended periods of time was not an option. If we did evacuate it would have been to an already



burnt area of our property (or neighbouring property) to wait for the fire front to pass, then we would return. We felt very much alone in our decision to stay and defend.

ii. Communications with the community over the course of the fire

On day 3 of the fire we were visited by a fire crew who were assessing properties for future defending. Our property was assessed as being defensible and the crew were quite helpful in calming our nerves by providing us with as much information as they had available to them at the time in relation to the location of the fire front and expected actions from fire crews during the course of that day.

Over the following 10 days we had two or three more crews attend the property briefly, again, providing us with as much information as they could at the time. It would have been extremely helpful if this information could have been provided via other means as the crews would only pass through when there was a lull in the fire, making the visits few and far between and fleeting in nature.

We would have liked to have attended the community meetings being held in various locations outside of the fire area, but again, as we were staying to defend, this was not an option for us. If minutes of these meetings (or a video feed) could have been uploaded to the DFES website we may have felt more informed.

Although we were not home at the time, we did receive a Rural Outreach folder from the Shire of Harvey after the fire threat had passed. This gesture was appreciated and the folder contained some helpful information around Departments to contact for post-emergency assistance.

iii. Provision of welfare support

Both my husband and I have witnessed first-hand examples of individuals who were not impacted by the fires taking advantage of the financial support being offered by the various Government departments. Both my husband and I lost paid working days as a result of the fire and are grateful for the support we have been offered and the speed in which the support was available. However, ultimately the financial support is funded through our taxation dollars and it was very easy to put a claim through with no means of verification as to the legitimacy of the claimant's situation. We would like to see more stringent vetting of claims to ensure the assistance goes to those that really need it and not those that are taking advantage of a generous handout during a stressful time.



iv. Management of people seeking to return to their properties, and

What about management of the people who have stayed to defend their properties? DFES have a separate Bushfire Survival Plan and Checklist for **Planning to Actively Defend**. It talks about what to do prior to the fire, what to do the “day” of the fire, and how to leave following to fire. It does not make reference or allowance for anyone actually staying after the initial fire front has passed. Leaving following the initial threat would have ultimately resulted in the loss of our property - my husband and our neighbour actively defended the fire front on more than one occasion with no assistance from emergency services. Although prepared to defend we could not have predicted the fire would be a threat for the extended period it was. We had a supply of diesel and petrol available which we used throughout the emergency, and also supplied to our neighbours when they ran out. We had no additional assistance from anyone in this regard. For two weeks we were without power and battling constant flare ups. We had a friend “sneak” past control points seven (7) days into the emergency as we had run out of fuel and food. The day after he left we had another major flare up on the property behind us. Without his delivery of fuel our tractor would not have been available to strengthen containment lines on the neighbouring property while waiting for emergency services to arrive. We would without a doubt have lost our property and our neighbours also.

We felt that by staying to defend we had ultimately chosen to “go it alone” and in future will absolutely ensure we have a much larger store of supplies, in case of a large scale emergency. If staying to defend is promoted, whether Officials agree or not, there must be better management of the property owners that remain. We have no doubt that without local knowledge and help of the people that stayed, many more properties would have been lost. Those staying to defend are an asset to the firefighting efforts and there must be a plan in place to manage them accordingly, not leaving them to battle on by themselves as many of us did.

h) Livestock and companion animal management and welfare issues.

We had a number of injured wildlife in the area within 24 hours of the fire starting. There was no information or help available via the DFES or DPAW websites, so we relied on social media to assist with locating suitable organisations to assist with the removal and care of these animals.

We understand the fire moved quickly and took many people by surprise, but it was obvious that with no red tape to navigate, many private and not-for-profit animal welfare groups were able to hit the ground within the first 24 hours.



## 2. Lessons learned from previous bushfire emergencies

- a) The extent to which the findings and recommendations of the following Western Australian bushfire reviews undertaken since 2011 have been implemented:
- i. A Shared Responsibility – Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review (Keelty, 2011);
  - ii. Appreciating the Risk – Report of the Special Inquiry into the November 2011 Margaret River Bushfire (Keelty, 2012);
  - iii. Post-Incident Analysis of the 2011 Margaret River and Nannup bushfires (Noetic Solutions, 2012);
  - iv. Parkerville Stoneville Mt Helena Bushfire Review (State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC, 2014);

There is mention in this report around concerns raised regarding the suitability of equipment in relation to terrain:

*“Many submissions to the Review expressed the view that some appliances that responded to the incident were inappropriate for the conditions experienced in the area. Much of this opinion comes from submissions with a particular focus on the four wheel drive operations of the incident.”.....“The Review confirmed that the mix of appliances from all agencies complemented the variety of operational strategies employed on the day, with many of these strategies running concurrently.”.*

During the course of the Waroona fire we had two occasions where we were required to assist in the recovery of firefighting appliances that had become stuck, one on our property and a few days later one on a neighbouring property. In both instances the cause of the appliance becoming “bogged” was the result of the driver not assessing the terrain properly prior to entering or ignoring the advice of locals who knew the landscape.

In the situation on our property we had advised the driver not to proceed any further (even though the truck would be considered a 4 wheel-drive model) as the sand would not support the weight of the vehicle fully loaded with water on board. Our advice was not taken and as a result the tank needed to be emptied and our tractor was utilised to tow the fire truck from the sand. This process took approximately 30 minutes.

The situation on a neighbouring property was similar in that the driver did not stop to assess the road conditions prior to proceeding down a lightly lime stoned access track. The driver was not from this area and was driving a metropolitan area red fire truck and was driving at speed. This vehicle was not equipped for off-road or sandy situations. As the track conditions deteriorated the driver continued and became stuck. There were a number of fire crews on site by this



stage and a fire actively burning on the property. We understand a call was placed for a dozer or heavy machinery to attend the site to assist – it never arrived. We had watched the situation unfold and attended with our tractor, and along with a neighbour’s tractor, were able to successfully remove the truck from the sand. This process took over an hour with the fire on the property still burning.

Although we appreciate time is of the essence in an emergency situation, and a mix of appliances may compliment the variety of operational strategies deployed, surely it is just as critical that drivers know where they’re going, the limitations of their vehicle and the type of terrain they are entering *before* they enter (a stuck truck isn’t going to put out any fires and may take away valuable resources and time in removing it).

Additional driver training may be helpful to assist crews to better assess their environment when attending emergency situations in regions that are not familiar to them. Take 5 – Step Back.

- v. O’Sullivan and Lower Hotham Bushfires Review (SEMC, 2016); and
  - vi. The Western Australian State Emergency Management Committee Preparedness reports.
- b) The effectiveness of reforms implemented by the State since 2011 on the State’s ability to prevent, mitigate and respond to major bushfires and the community’s understanding of and preparedness for bushfire risk.

### 3. The need for further reform

Any legislative, policy or functional reforms relating to bushfire risk management, emergency management and processes for review of major incidents to strengthen the State’s capability to efficiently and effectively manage bushfire-related risk.



2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2016

Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM, Special Enquirer,

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

**In response to the Terms of Reference 1 (a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities;**

We are a family farming operation in the Uduc area of Harvey District. Through working together as a team, we were able to achieve a high standard of fire protection, well equipped to protect our own land as well as our neighbours. In our circumstances we own 3 firefighting units and 2 sets of cultivators pulled by tractors.

During the time of this fire we experienced “fingers of fire” escaping from the fire front along unmaintained roadside verges and drains. This led to another uncontrollable fire, travelling at great speed, aided by the weather conditions at the time. Many more kilometres of fencing were lost along the roadside verges, not to forget where there is a hot fire the majority of animals and reptiles were killed in the path. It needs to be noted that in our area in the past when there were open irrigation channels there was green grass around the channel, which created a fire break, today with the piped system of irrigation it all underground.

Fire prevention starts by cleaning up the roadsides and drains with cool burns and maintenance. This task could be carried out by land owners or local voluntary bushfire units to gain hands on experience in fire control.

**In response to Terms of Reference 1 (d) The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance;**

In the early stage of the fire, the notification through DFES was behind the time, understandable due to the immensity of the situation. Through Farmer to farmer communication and on the ground research from hour to hour our task was made easier. A number of Farmers/landowners in the Uduc area developed a network of communication that enabled messages to be conveyed to other farmers cut off due to the fire, but their farms were not burnt, although they were isolated. This was carried out by on the ground mobile phone messages. Due to the heavy smoke hazard, communication with these people was vital, updates on the location of the fire was essential. This type of communication was not available through DFES.

With this fire, many teams from other districts were bought in, some of these teams became disorientated on the back roads due to their lack of local knowledge and poor visibility. The Shire of Harvey has a bushfire plan – Local Emergency Management Arrangement. Through this authority we would recommend that a more supported bushfire

response with a division commander from DFES workings alongside an elected farmer leader to improve the defence line, resulting in a more coordinated approach to the fire. There should be a Register of farmers in the Uduc/Harvey Area with contact numbers and equipment available that can be called upon in the event of a fire. A farmer in this day and age is multi-skilled, people who use their initiative and with the unpredictability of this fire it was imperative that farmers be involved at a local level.

From the events as they unfolded I would like to explain how we were able to assist DFES in fighting the fire. "At the time of the Uduc fire, I was proceeding to construct firebreaks on my cousin's property on Fouracre and Wellard Roads in an attempt to bolster containment lines. Due to the emergency situation, a DFES officer requested that a backup defence line was required on Government Road in an urgent effort to slow down the fire and prevent the potential threat of the fire moving towards Harvey. Further to that request, through regular communication with DFES additional firebreaks were carried out west on Fouracre and Field Roads" The involvement of farmers with creating containment lines helped to save the town of Harvey.

The Uduc area is vulnerable to the threat of fire due to the west wind influence. With a coordinated approach with the availability of machinery by farmers, the opportunity to work together in an emergency situation will result in more favourable outcomes.

We ask that Farmers, together with their resources be respected and utilised in a more beneficial way. That there should be a leader appointed Farmer to communicate with DFES in our Uduc area to relay messages in an official capacity. We all have technology at our finger tips, it is how we use it that counts.

**In response to Terms of Reference 1.(g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire: (ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire**

As previously quoted, DEFS were behind in their reports. Farmers in the immediate vicinity of the fire need a person of contact for absolute accuracy of the location of the fire. We would suggest that would be a local community representative.

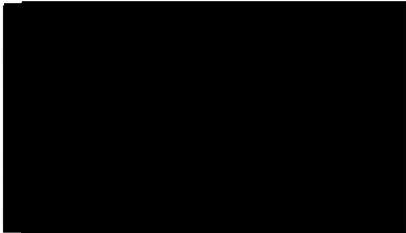
**In response to Terms of Reference 1.(g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire: (iv) Management of people seeking to return to their properties**

Farmers have a stewardship of the land and their animals. Farmers could not afford to leave the farm during this fire because due to the road blocks it was impossible to return to tend the animals. If there could be a system devised whereby local farmers can be identified by traffic controllers (driver's license) to gain re-entry to operate emergency procedures on their farm or neighbouring farm.

On an hour to hour basis there should be provision for essential services to operate within safe areas.

I wish to state that if needed I would be willing to present this submission, if required.

Kind Regards,



Email:

Mob.



## Submission to the Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

Author:

[REDACTED]

Email:

Phone:

[REDACTED]

Preferred method of correspondence: Email or phone

I make this submission as a member of the Cookernup Volunteer Bushfire Brigade ([REDACTED]) and as a resident of the district of Yarloop. The fire came through our property on the night of Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> of January. We successfully defended all our major infrastructure from the fire.

**With reference to 1. (d) “The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance;” of the terms of reference I wish to make the following submission.**

I worked a number of shifts with the Cookernup Brigade from Tuesday the 12<sup>th</sup> of January through to Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> of January mopping up after the main fire and putting out any new flare-ups. My shifts started at the Cookernup brigade headquarters in Riverdale Road, Cookernup. The brigade headquarters seemed to be a major incident control point with I would think well over ten appliances working from it yet the only DFES staff that I observed when I was at the headquarters were a chaplain and the deputy incident controller, the latter being there for a short visit.

Most of the members of our brigade are trained fire fighters and were out on the fire ground doing what they do best, fighting fires. This left very few at the fire station to organise resources, organise T-cards, give out maps, and do briefings and debriefings. I think that there should have been at least one person from DFES at our station helping with these tasks. I think they should have had a computer, printer and a reliable communications link with the incident control centre so we could get the most up to date maps and information about the fire and so that information about the fire from our area could be fed back to the incident control centre.

**With reference to 1. (e) “Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency services organisations and the community;” of the terms of reference I wish to make the following submission.**

### **Communications**

The main fire on Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> and Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> caused the failure of the landline phone system in the Cookernup and Yarloop area and cut power to the Optus mobile phone tower off Riverdale Road to the east of Cookernup. I assume that the phone tower ran off batteries until the batteries were exhausted I think sometime on Saturday at which point this tower went off-line. I am not sure if this was the only Optus phone tower to go off-line at this time but for a number of residents in the Cookernup and Yarloop districts including myself it meant that phone and internet communications were impossible or nearly impossible until a temporary generator was set up at the Cookernup phone tower on Tuesday.

I think it is totally unacceptable that that tower was allowed to go off-line due to the batteries going flat when that tower was never, to my knowledge, under direct threat from the fire and I should think that Optus had plenty of warning as to when the batteries would go flat when the mains power failed.

### **Water**

In my time as a brigade member it has always amazed me how poorly mapped all the water resources that could be used to refill appliances are. I believe a considerable amount of fire fighting time is wasted because of appliances having to travel to and from water points.

Another issue is water points that may be functional but are locked up. A good case in point is a large tank to the south of Logue Brook Dam Road just upstream of the dam wall which is surrounded by a large locked fence. From what I can gather no one in the brigade knows if this is a functional water point and who is in control of it.

Over the past five years or so Harvey Water has installed probably hundreds of above ground pressurised water supply points for farms and small holdings in Cookernup and other areas. Again I find it amazing that these easily accessible water points have not been equipped with the necessary valves and pipe fittings to make it easy for appliances to have access to water at these points.

Another water source that is readily available but normally difficult to access are the large water tanks that most houses have these days. Again, all it would take would be the fitting of suitable valves and a **standardised** outlet water fitting that could be connected to the pipes carried by the fire appliances.

**With reference to 1. (f) “The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors;” and 1. (g)(ii) “Communications with the community over the course of the fire” of the terms of reference I wish to make the following submission.**

I thought the warnings issued by ABC Local Radio and on the DFES website were inadequate for the people who were staying in the area under threat from the fire. Information on the road closures and evacuation details are very useful information for those people wanting to travel through the area or wanting to be evacuated but of no use to people who are staying in the affected area except maybe in the case where they want to avoid the road blocks if they need to go out of and come back into the affected area.

At some point during the period before the fires were contained I remember hearing part of an interview on ABC local Radio with the incident controller which gave very good information about the fire behaviour, and where the current fire fronts were. I would like to see this sort of information summarised and added to the regular warning broadcasts. I would also like this information to be available and updated regularly in map form somewhere on the DFES website. Another option would be to have a subscription service to the map and warning information and have it sent via MMS when new updates become available.

**With reference to 1.(g) “Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire:**

**(iv) Management of people seeking to return to their properties, and “**

**“1.(h)Livestock and companion animal management and welfare issues.”**

**I wish to make the following submission.**

I think the major problem with the “Management of people seeking to return to their properties” is the belief by the authorities that they know better than the people who want to get back to their properties the dangers involved in doing so and the belief by the authorities that they can look after those properties and the stock on them better than the local owners .

The heavy handed approach of making it nearly impossible for people to return to protect their assets and stock, regardless of the competency and local knowledge of the person trying to get in, can only lead to frustration, anger and maybe unnecessary losses for the property owner.. This is exacerbated by the person manning the road block probably having little or no knowledge of the real dangers that will be faced by the property owner.

I think a better approach to handling people trying to get to their properties in the affected area would be to make sure that the people at the road blocks have adequate, up to date and accurate information about the dangers facing the person trying to get to their property. The person at the road block could discuss that information with the property owner and let the property owner be part of the decision making process .

If it were the case that I thought the authorities could have protected the assets and the stock on my property from the fire at less risk better than I could, I would happily have left my property and waited until the authorities let me return to it. I don't have the confidence that the authorities have the resources, local knowledge or competency to look after my property better than I did. This view has certainly been strengthened after being involved in the fire fighting effort during the Waroona fire.

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 3 March 2016 9:59 AM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** TRIM: Waroona Fire

**Categories:** Blue Category

## **To Whom It May Concern**

I think that there is a number of opportunities for change and improvement. I have spoken to a lot of local people in recent days and to a man there is no criticism of any individuals in the field: Firefighters, Police or Parks and Wildlife staff.

These comments are valid in the context of extreme weather conditions and these conditions are not unusual in this district each year.

I would point out a number of obvious issues that need addressing.

1. The utilisation of local resources. (personnel and equipment)
2. Clarity of management protocols. (permits, engagement of support equipment & fire strategies)
3. Utilisation of interstate resources.
4. Planning
5. Emergency notifications
6. Fire carrying corridors
7. Life and Asset Protection
8. Bushfire Emergency Plans
9. Reporting of fires
10. Road Closures

### **1. The utilisation of local resources. (personnel and equipment)**

Here, in Waroona we have the highest ratio of earth-moving equipment to resident population than any where else in Australia you could expect (this was quoted in State Parliament on Wednesday 17th Feb). The use of this equipment to integrate into a fire response organisation only occurred in a haphazard approach and in a lot of cases despite DEFS being in control. Personally, I was involved in addressing the fire on the northern boundary on Coronation Road from the bridge west of Somers Road through to Dorsett Road. We used a grader, and 2 FELs with a 1kl firepump on a 4wd. There was no management,

assistance or direction from DFES except when we called them back due to a jump-over or major flare-up.

The fire crews did an excellent job to protect houses and life under extremely trying conditions, but they did not stay around to ensure that there were no flare-ups. One house was left unprotected with many burning trees in close proximity and it was left to us to find this situation and develop a solution to push the trees down as they were threatening the DFES "saved house and sheds".

There is a significant opportunity to have an officer in the field to take control of a manageable sector and direct both DFES resources and local farmer and earthmoving contractor resources.

## **2. Clarity of management protocols. (permits, engagement of support equipment & fire strategies)**

a] It was obvious that the protocols trying to be implemented were not appropriate for local farming communities.

Farmers who were battling the fire with little or no support from DFES, did so while implementing their own bushfire emergency plans. After several days of working to their emergency plans they had to come to town for replenishment of fuel and some food items so that they could continue to protect their major assets. They were hindered by the lack of understanding, lack of support, lack of urgency to assist them to get back to their families and supporters (family and neighbours) to keep their equipment working so that they could actually maintain their Bushfire Emergency Plan.

I am aware of 4 people who were delayed at the headquarters in Waroona trying to get a permit for more than 2 hours while leaving family members at home with dwindling fuel supplies and in some cases no transport to be able to leave. The hand written permit system that took hours to process actually put people at risk on the farms by preventing those in town returning to their farms with much needed fuel.

There were also a number of people who stopped at the road block before entering town and called people who lived in town to bring fuel and food etc to them so that they did not have to cross the road block and be denied return to their farms.

b] There is no leadership in the field to direct DFES at the fire front or engage with the local farmers and contractors with machines to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach.

c] The strategy of waiting for the fire to come to the road to control fire is clearly a flawed approach as the road verges in summer in rural areas tend to carry the highest fire load. This strategy puts extreme pressure on firefighters to prevent jump-overs.

d] Fire crews from other districts do not know access points, water points, or what topography is around the next bend.

e] Non off-road pumpers being sent to address fires in farm paddocks. Drivers drive them to the location, then refuse to go off-road to address the fire. If fire fighters are instructed not to go off-road, then why would those units be sent to address the fire?

f] Where local farmers used earthmoving equipment and fire fighting equipment together with ploughs they were quite successful in stopping the fire in the paddocks as the fuel load is quite low.

g] Where DFES were deployed to stop the fire at a road, they doused the flames, then went off to another hot spot en masse. No process was in place to patrol and maintain the foreground from flare-ups or jump-overs. This was one of the critical deficiencies in the fire fighting strategy.

If local farmers and earthmoving contractors were seen as a resource instead of problem, then firefighting capacity is enhanced.

Developing a permit system 2 days into a fire emergency does not seem to me to be a good use of valuable resources, a permit system that meets the needs of an urban community does not meet the needs of a rural community that has fire fighting capability. There needs to be a process that if a person comes out of a rural fire zone to replenish supplies upon sighting their driver's licence (verification of address), they should be given a token, a wrist band or a permit as they come out so that they can immediately return unimpeded.

Fire crews working in specific areas need to be coordinated by a person who has local knowledge and be trained in the co-ordination of earthmoving and firefighting resources.

Send the appropriate equipment to fight fires, city/town based non off-road units are not the best use of resources.

### **3. Utilisation of interstate resources.**

WA has a long record of innovation and sharing of resources. It seems inexplicable that we had the Minister of Emergency Services defending the non-engagement of interstate resources. I understand that some interstate manpower was engaged, but given the potential outcome of this fire, that trigger could have been used earlier. Hearing reports of firefighters and famers at the fire front for 30 plus hours is a significant breach of duty of care by the management of the

emergency services organisation. It is a proven case that as people work beyond 16 hours the likelihood of injury or potential fatality increases exponentially. More water bombers could have made a difference, if the strategy is to continue to not allow firefighters to fight the fire in lower fuel areas rather than road verges.

Question:

Should there be an agreement or understanding between states as to what is available to be shared before the bushfire season commences?

With a fire storm of the magnitude that we faced on Wednesday night and the forecast of extreme weather over the next few days, that was a good time to ask for more resources from interstate. Just imagine how effective the heavy duty water bombers from NSW would have been on Thursday, and would we as a community be facing the huge costs that we are today? Would there have been loss of life? Would there have been fire units lost?

Western Australia needs to understand that with the advent of new technology, we need to be at the forefront to protect people and resources.

It is obvious that with the severity of the fires of recent years and the way that the crown land is managed that better fire fighting capacity needs to be utilised and if this means we need bigger water bombers, more local fire brigades, change in strategy to take the fight to the fire instead of waiting for it to come to assets or roads. Something significant needs to change.

## **4. Planning**

There are a number of issues with regards to planning. The only FESA known water point for the northern side of the fire was on Fawcett Road. There is another Harvey Water 4" connection on Dorsett Road controlled by Shire of Waroona, but this was not opened until Friday, after the major threat was reduced. This meant that a tanker was deployed to this area between Somers Road and Dorsett Road, when this resource could have been used in other strategically important places.

Integration of earthmover and farmer firefighters is not allowed for in the rural areas.

The strategy of keeping all firefighting resources on the road and not allowing them to go to the fire and meet it in low fuel areas is flawed. There are resources like Rangers and Shire workers who have local knowledge, along with the farming community who can advise where it is appropriate to squeeze the fire to bring it under control.

The Shire of Waroona had a LEMAC committee some years ago, unfortunately the local shire was not overly supportive of the concept. The local OIC Waroona

Police at the time ensured that there was engagement between the local resources and procedures were put in place. This ensured that there was clear understanding of roles between the local Volunteer fire fighters, Police, Ambulance, Shire, and earth moving contractors. Registers and procedures were developed and this was ready to be used, but apparently this whole community based emergency management process has lapsed.

There is an opportunity to ensure that there are procedures for permitting farmers back onto their landholding if they are in a stay and defend role ( but have to come out for replenishment of supplies). There is a need to identify what resources are available interstate and set some criteria that allow the decision to be made at the earliest opportunity to bring those resources in.

There is an opportunity to develop a process to engage local farmers and earthmoving contractors into field led fire response teams.

## 5. Emergency notifications

In my experience the emergency notifications did not work. We live at 236 Dorsett Road Waroona and there was no notification for more than 2 days. On the Wednesday night the fire was approximately 2.5km from our boundary and on Thursday the wind was bringing it in our direction. I checked the DFES site at 9.30pm Wednesday night for any concerns and it was clear that the fire was contained to Lane Pool reserve. At 10.30pm I received a call from my neighbour (who had been notified by a friend, not the DFES )to say that the fire had jumped the South West Highway at Waroona and was heading west out through Hamel. On Friday at 4.13pm I received the Bushfire Emergency Text on my phone while my wife's phone nor our home phone never received a notification at all. This notification was in regard to Lake Clifton which is more than 7km to our west. We found that the information on the DFES site while comprehensive, was not timely, was not specific and is difficult to quickly identify what had changed in the notification and what was the same. Sometimes the notification pointed out some new information, but scanning the document it was difficult to find that new information.

I suggest that DFES use **Highlight** or put in **bold** any changed information in the emergency warning bulletins so that people can understand the impacts of it quickly.

## 6. Fire carrying corridors

Road verges and irrigation drainage channels that run due west became fireballs due to the overload of fuel and prevailing easterly wind. These were the main conduits to bring the fires out onto the Waroona "flats".

Government departments and the local shire need to reduce fuel loads in the areas under their responsibility.

The combination of these fuel corridors and the lack of fire fighting in paddocks meant that the fire was only being observed by the most experienced fire fighters, while the farmers and their supporters were keeping the fire to corridors and protecting their assets as best they could.

## **7. Life and Asset Protection**

The effort to protect life is recognised. The protection of life at bricks and mortar assets was exceptional, if the fire had been contained before it was so widespread by taking the fight to the fire in the paddocks on the flats would have prevented widespread destruction. The notion that assets are only bricks and mortar maybe appropriate for the urban area, but is not effective for rural farming areas. Fire fighting is different for each classification, forestry, plantation, grazing country, hobby farms, towns, suburbs and cities. It appears that DFES and DPAW don't apply any different strategies for these differing areas. In the suburbs, bricks and mortar is top priority, while in grazing country a hay shed full of hay can be more valuable than a house. The importance that farmers put on livestock and animal welfare and farm assets does not appear to be taken into account by people in control. Local volunteers fully understand and seem to be able identify the right balance of priorities, but during this fire common sense went out the window.

## **8. Bushfire Emergency Plans**

I, like my neighbours have taken note of the State Government advertising and prepared and implemented our own Bushfire Emergency Plans. We all had sufficient fuel on site for generators and fire fighter pumps, but after several days we ran low and had to go to Waroona for supplies.

This meant that I had the only transport left at our farm in town and could not return so that my wife could follow our emergency plan. This means that bureaucracy and ill fated mismanagement reduced our emergency plan to nothing.

This was when we came across the road closures and were advised that we needed a permit to return. In trying to get a permit at 11.00am on Friday morning I was told that the person in charge was the only person who could issue a permit

and that he was in a hand over meeting with night shift. This is an incredible statement. Think about this from a duty of care position where a person has worked a whole night shift and then has to stay back to make a handover to day shift this takes till after 11.00am!

We were able to get fuel and after several hours obtained a permit to get to our properties, we thought that we could get milk, bread and a few essentials, but the shelves in the shop were all but bare.

## **9. Reporting of Fires**

DFES say that the fire was reported at around 7.00am Wednesday morning. The cause of the fire was lightning strike. I recall watching the lightning storm on Tuesday afternoon and there are many people who saw the smoke go up from Lane Poole around 4.30pm. The storm had passed the local area by 5.30pm, so the likelihood of a further lightning strike after 5.30pm at Lane Poole was almost impossible. Our emergency services in extreme weather conditions didn't pick this up till the next morning. There must be something wrong with this process to leave a fire burning more than 14 hours in extreme weather conditions before any action is taken.

### **10. Road Closures**

As a community we understand the need for road closures and checkpoints. The road closure at Greenlands Road Pinjarra on the South West highway was administered in such a way that local businesses could not get new stock delivered. Garages were not able to get fuel delivered, supermarket could not get bread or milk delivered, these items are essential even in an emergency. Fuel was able to be brought through for emergency generators and the Emergency Management headquarters, but for the local businesses, no support whatsoever. Local farmers were prevented from tending injured stock or to feed the animals after the fire had passed, so this created animal welfare issues. If a landowner treated stock the way that they were forced to in the ensuing days animal welfare groups would have them in court as quick as a blink of the eye. But in the name of "emergency management" these road blocks remained in place to frustrate farmers and prolong animal suffering.

I expect that a lot of the issues that I have raised already have or are in the process of being addressed. But I feel that it is important to set the issues out as I see them to ensure that the inquiry sees the severe impacts that Emergency Services Management has had on a small community.

I also raised most of these issues by email with Mr Stephen Johnston Chief Superintendent Operational Readiness & Standards DFES on January 15th.

I write these comments as a landowner who was in close proximity to the fires on the north side and through the efforts of my neighbours and myself we prevented the fire jumping Coronation Road and burn towards Peel Road West and Dorsett Road.

I would like to make myself available to expand on the points raised above and can be contacted by return email or phone below.

Regards

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted signature]

██████████  
██████████  
March 3 2016

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

We reside at ██████████ and for references purposes our farming property is situated some **14 km's SW of the Yarloop town site. *Our property was totally burnt out with the exceptions of buildings we personally saved.***

As a long term resident of the district (and previously a long term Bush Fire Control Office of 25 years' experience) I wish to place before the enquiry the following facts that occurred specific to our circumstances and situation.

For simplicity I will bullet point and only elaborate where necessary. Further detail can be supplied by me if requested for proof or follow up.

- My experience is first hand actively saving our lives and property by staying and defending
- NO SMS alerts ever!
- Being ignored by DFES until well after the emergency was passed (help arrived some days later for mop up only)
- Refusal to allow one of us to pass through a road block to fetch fuel and return to our property to continue to defend.
- Being refused the only request I made to 000 for a helicopter assistance to protect a **LARGE INTENSIVE PIGGERY OF SOME 5,000 ANIMALS.**
- At the time of the request they were only focused on flying directly over our buildings to drop water on bush several km's away.....whilst we were directly under threat (active fire a few meters away for the building edge)
- **Significant flying time to refill was wasted** (15 mins) *when a water source was only minutes from the fire front.*
- **Significant driving time was lost** (40 minutes' minimum) repeatedly ignored a 24-hour fast fill water point on our property...flood lit and sign posted
- Those personal in charge of mop up crews (when they finally arrived) did not seek or appreciate our input or local knowledge and significant resources were wasted by them directing machinery and fire units doing stupid low priority duties.

By way of explanation some history in the lead up to the events is necessary

### **January 7<sup>th</sup> 2016 AM**

- Early that morning I was aware the fire had crossed the SW highway south of Waroona and was in the vicinity of Summers Road (a distance approx. 8 to 10 km's NE of us. Cold ash was falling. I considered a threat to our home, property and livestock was possible and that resources and local knowledge was essential to assist the fire controllers in suppression. (Our property is in a sparsely populated farming area)

- I drove as far as a Police Road block cnr. of Johnson Road/Bristol Road where I was stopped and refused access to continue to a fire control point. **I had with me the GPS co-ordinates of a 100 % reliable water source** on the property with deep unlimited water and a very large cleared area guaranteed safe for to helicopters to refill. I have a previous pilots license I knew what I was talking about
- I was refused access to the Control point.....I was refused an email address.....I was refused phone access .....I was refused radio access.....it was important these GPS co-ordinates were passed on urgently in an electronic format or personally to prevent error.
- The police at that road block would only allow the GPS co-ordinates to be written in their notebook supposedly to be passed on.....**I believe they DID NOTHING**
- I made repeated efforts to pass this information on during the emergency....it was passed personally by me to DFES and volunteer vehicles each day once they eventually arrived some days later!
- *This water source was minutes flying time away from the fire front and I **watched in growing frustration and rage** as for the **next 9 DAYS** helicopters flew long distances to refill whilst the fire raged around us.*
- 

### January 7<sup>th</sup> PM

- By 5pm that Thursday afternoon I had made the assessment that our property was under threat as I had done a drive around and noted spot fires cnr. Of Clifton Road / Government Road.....This area is SW of Yarloop town site and some maybe 5 to 7 km's East of us.
- By 9.30pm a raging fire front was approaching our property and we were lucky to escape with our lives.
- By 10 pm our property was a raging inferno!
- Sometime that night in the early hours of Friday morning the two farming property immediately North had lost their homes and sheds....no units ever came to help.
- **AT NO TIME DID WE EVER RECEIVE AN SMS ALERT OR ANY ADVICE THAT WE WERE IN THE DIRECT LINE OF THE FIRE OR THAT WE WERE IN FACT NEAR ANY FIRE THREAT.**
- *The fire raged for 9 days on our property and around us and we never received any alerts EVER!*
- We survived and saved the buildings and piggery simply because we were prepared, aware, alert and proactive and had good neighbor's acting and watching with us.
- *We defended the "indefensible" with our 2 privately owned light duty fire units, tractors, experience, common sense and a bloody lot of luck.*
- **The SMS alert system is an abject failure.**

### FRIDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> TO SATURDAY 16<sup>th</sup>

- The fire threat to our remaining buildings and the 2 houses did not abate until Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January.
- We did not receive any outside help from DFES or volunteers for actively defending our property at the time of the fire front crisis.
- Once help did arrive for urgently needed mop up and frequent break outs and flare *ups* the changeover crews were never advised of our 24-hour fast fill water supply
- **One crew leaves the new crew is told to drive the 40 mins return trip to fill up!**
- DFES had no ability to even pass on simple important information!
- **We were forced to assign one family member and vehicle for many days to be constantly watching for fire crews leaving the area to refill (40 mins return**

**trip) so we could intercept these new crews and direct them to our clearly flood lit sign posted water source on farm.....2 or 3 mins away maximum!**

- The road blocks were poorly thought out
- Stupid decisions were enforced preventing locals to move through these road blocks for animal welfare reasons (milking cows, feeding livestock)
- In previous years there had been excavated natural water sources in the forestry and pines for firefighting..... this knowledge appears to have been lost now it is all "centralized" and staff do not work or reside locally!.....when these areas were under threat the "authorities" had no knowledge of them!
- It was us "locals" who repeatedly directed fire units to them.....the fire units were astounded and appreciative.... pity the incident controllers didn't seek or appreciate our local input...the outcome may have been somewhat different.

There are many more incidents and examples of the incompetence of those in charge however I am sure a lot of these will be repetitive from others experiences.

I acknowledge the ferocity and unpredictability of the fire. The weather at that time made this fire uncontrollable and no one could have made the right decisions or allocated the resources in time before the whole situation changed...it was a holocaust beyond comprehension.

In conclusion I wish to state my first hand experiences leave me with the following impressions and feelings.

- ❖ DFES proved themselves incapable of coordinating the resources available
- ❖ DFES showed countless times they did not want, seek or respect local knowledge
- ❖ DFES displayed an arrogance that beggar's belief in the manner in which they assumed command and dictated
- ❖ DEFS appeared to have no ability to either receive or pass on important messages or communications either to the public or within the ranks of the various agencies involved...volunteer or paid
- ❖ DFES made reactive decisions after the YARLOOP town site disaster ..such as evacuating HARVEY town site .....experienced locals refused to move despite move on notices. DFES had lost credibility by then
- ❖ DFES made reactive completely stupid decisions in some of the road block positions and the intransigence they showed in a blanket banning of local fire fighters and equipment moving in and out of the area!
  
- ❖ The SMS alert system is a failure.....**I believe I have identified one reason alerts were not received**
  
- ❖ **I have examined my mobile phone records** and it shows that as we reside in an outlying area the phone signal is intermittent and weak and therefore our mobile was locking into several towers during the emergency ... (whichever is the strongest signal at the time.) **My records show WAROONA, MYALUP, BRUNSWICK, HARVEY at different times during the emergency even though we never moved from our area of YARLOOP**
  
- ❖ When an SMS alert is sent you cannot assume that the "local area tower" is going to service everyone in that local area. Those residing within the danger or alert area may be at a time of weak signal and their mobile may well be locked into an adjoining cell tower that theoretically is not servicing the alert area.

❖ **My recommendation is that when an alert for an area is required the adjoining cell towers surrounding the affected area also send to all those mobiles in range.** The wording can be carefully selected so those receiving can ascertain if it applies directly to them.....better to alert too many than miss some and lose lives or property as a result.

Until I am satisfied that DFES have the ability to change and the mindset and resources to handle emergencies in our area I will continue to treat them with little credibility and place no reliance on them for any assistance or decision making.

DFES personnel showed an arrogance and incompetence beyond belief. We survived the inferno without them.

In fact, they only made it harder by refusing us access in and out of the road blocks for much needed fuel. **(We sneaked past them using local knowledge and replenished our own fuel supplies...as a result we saved 2 houses, multiple sheds and 5,000 pigs).** If we had not, then DFES would have been held accountable for these potential losses as well!

Yours faithfully

██████████

████████████████████

mobil ██████████

Fax ██████████

## Submission to Waroona Fire Enquiry

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Phone [REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED]

### Biographical Notes:

- Farming 1978- 2004 Gairdner/ Boxwood area of Jerramungup Shire cleared approx. half of the 1200 hectare property.
- Whilst farming in the Jerramungup Shire was one of the foundation members of the Jerramungup Landcare Committee and later a member of the Jerramungup Advisory Committee to the Dept. Of Agriculture. Membership of these groups led to some experience in extension with the ability to get people interested in learning and then to feed that interest by arranging seminars or meetings at which relevant experts could sell the ideas. An approach which is needed with regard to community fire strategy.
- Several years as Captain, Boxwood Hill Volunteer Bushfire Brigade 1980's  
*Further fire experience overleaf.*

*Balance of biographical notes.*

- After farming worked in the Great Victoria Desert, observed wildfires in progress and noted after effects of an extreme fire through from northeast of Queen Victoria Spring. Observed epicormic growth on Marble Gums in less severely burnt areas.
- Spent years working on the Barrow Island oilfield during which time was active in fighting Spinifex fires. Witness to a fatal oil fire in 67/68
- Family had a farm in Bridgetown from which we had one bracken burn escape and on which I carried out spring burning through our jarrah country.
- Family farming east of Popanyinning 1950-1962 saw this boy very keen to have the open burning season commence in early April to allow him the fun of burning up small areas of tops of jam trees (from post cutting) and clearing his own small patches of dirt.
- January 1961 saw a lightning strike wildfire on the Popanyinning farm. Vivid memories remain of the ability to see the glow of the Dwellingup (100kms west) fire on the horizon that night.
- First memories of fire in the bush are 1949 at west Pingelly as a 5 year old with my older sister having a campfire to burn chops & bake spuds in the coals.

Having played with fire for much of my life I feel equipped to comment and suggest **knowledge of bushfire must be taught to modern society.**

## Submissions as per terms of Reference

### Point 1 (a)

- Last year I camped on Yarloop Rifle Range & noted heavy fuel loading in the surrounding bush.

That such a fuel loading was tolerated by relevant authorities and the community living so close is astounding.

Our forest evolved with frequent lower intensity fires as a beneficial feature of the forest environment.

It is essential that infrastructure adjoining bush land is protected by buffer areas created by regular fuel reduction burns.

Reference to Bushfires Act 1954 Division 6 Section 34: It would appear that the 200 meter buffer zone should be increased. It may also be beneficial to facilitate easier access, for both neighbours and Volunteer Bushfire Brigades, to both Forest land & road reserves by arrangement. Short term road closures may be a feasible alternative to the expense of Traffic Management Contractors

Since the fire through Yarloop I have provided some assistance to friends & have observed both the burnt and unburnt country.

It is noticeable that road verges & boundary fence lines where unburnt are carrying a heavy fuel loading of dry grass.

Such fuel loading would be a major contributor to fence destruction in any fire.

In a cattle grazing area there does not appear to have been a concerted effort to break expanses of dry pasture with strips of heavier grazing pressure by sheep in spring or by planting of green summer forage in electric fenced strips.

Heavily grazed or green areas can be both a firebreak and a refuge for stock during fire.

Were local fire bylaws rigorously enforced throughout the area?

Were the requirements of the bylaws adequate for all local situations?

Reference to the Harvey Shire Firebreak Order: Firebreaks of 3 meters width 6 meters from buildings etc are, in my view, lamentably inadequate. Around homestead infrastructures an adaption of the plantation firebreak requirement of 15 meters may be more sensible. Lawn areas or gravelled roadways would suffice. The Harvey firebreak order appeared to have no requirement for property fire units in readiness throughout summer.

There are homestead areas where it appears that the fire just skipped past leaving them unscathed.

Was that good management of infrastructure surrounds, luck or fire fighting activity?

Much can be done with selection of homestead trees & garden species so when combined with well maintained surrounds a country homestead can be a refuge in itself.

Perhaps it is time to mimic the Water Wise sales pitch with a programme to promote bushfire wisdom & keep your garden & home fire safe. Yes to Deciduous trees, NO to Eucalypts nearby, yes to low flammability shrubbery, NO to woodchip & bark mulches.

*Please refer page numbers 5 & 6 for further suggestions for fire readiness*

# Preparation For Fire Season

## Suggested Methods to minimise damage & limit extent of any fire on rural land

### Road Verges;

- Councils and / or Main Roads must cut red tape and allow landholders, with road frontage, managed access to remove fuel loads.
  
- Temporary road closures should be readily negotiable
  - OPTIONS for fuel reduction:
    - Grazing, sheep or goats shepherded or constrained with temporary electric fencing and maybe temporary gates at each end of a road section with only residents having keys for access.
  
    - Mechanical such as whippersnippers, mowers or slashers
  
    - Chemical (Microfit Herbi handheld CDA sprayers would be useful) with the likes of non selectives. i.e. Glyphosate, Paraquat or grass selectives such as Fluazifop, Sethoxydim.
  
    - Physical removing of trash around tree trunks by raking & cutting fallen branches, twigs, gum leaves etc and then burning during the cool months.
  
  - **A MARVELLOUS OPPORTUNITY FOR SCHOOLS, CHILDREN & PARENTS TO WORK AS GROUP FOR BENEFIT OF ALL.**
  - **What kid won't enjoy time with little bonfires?**

## Farmland;

- OPTIONS:
  - Much as for Road Verges
  - In particular around all infrastructure such as houses, sheds & yards. A simple firebreak as per local bylaws will never serve as well as extensive areas of tidiness or irrigated green grass.
  - Cattle paddocks could have hazard reduction management in springtime;
    - With intensive sheep grazing in the growing season in electric fenced strips so as to limit spread of a ground fire in summer
    - The alternate in irrigation areas would be to break paddocks with electric fenced strips of irrigated sudax, millet, maize or similar summer greens.
  - Fence lines;
    - Tall dry grass residues can be prevented three ways:
    - Whippersnipper clean up
    - Strip grazing along fence line with sheep using temporary electric fencing to create an adjacent laneway.
    - Use of appropriate herbicides along fence lines.
      - A stroll with a Micron Herbi using Glyphosate can clean a strip along & under the wires improving electric fence performance, reducing corrosion and vastly reducing risk of total fence destruction in a fire.
  - Paddock trees in parkland setting:
    - Clean up & remove fallen limbs & twigs.
    - In rank cattle pastures try & clear excess grass from close to trunks to minimise fire running up the bark & lighting upper sections of the tree.

## Property Owner's Fire Units:

- Every property larger than 2 hectares could be required to hold a fire unit in readiness throughout the fire season.
- A minimum 400 litre with minimum 5 hp pump & appropriate fire hose either ute or trailer mounted.

Lessons can be learnt from the wheat belt where machinery operating in crops pose a constant threat at harvest time.

Such fire units are mandatory and such is the community ethos of cooperation that any hint of smoke will see the neighbourhood stop harvest and many fire units will flock to the fire & beat it often before it can escape the paddock where it started.

## **Point 2(a)1 the Keelty Report:**

Two points on page 13, of this report appeared most relevant:

Quoting: “Fundamental to the concept of disaster resilience, is that individuals and communities be more self reliant and prepared to take responsibility for the risks they live with”

“At the opposite end of the scale is ‘learned helplessness’ where a community sits back and expects government to provide all the answers.”

One is easily left with the impression that changing demographics in the South West may be shifting communities toward the ‘learned helplessness’ which is undesirable and most likely unsustainable in economic terms.

Recommendation 18: Proposal to use satellite imagery could, in conjunction with DAFWA food on offer programme, be useful in monitoring spring flush of pasture growth to assist plan intensive grazing regimes or put on record for fire season planning the location of dry grass fuel loads.

Recommendation 30: Main Roads & bridge inspections. Was the lost bridge on South west highway clear of debris and only lost due to the intensity of the firestorm?

Recommendation 38: Supports the suggestion to increasing homestead firebreak standards.

Recommendations 7 -10 inc: All critically important items which can enhance fire resilience of the community.

**With regard to fire a self reliant rural community is by far the most cost effective fire management system available.**

## **Community Fire Knowledge, Preparedness and Self Reliance Must be Promoted**

Changing demographics in the south west of WA have contributed to a decline in practical fire knowledge in the community.

Older farmers & foresters are in the minority

FIFO workers own rural land and may be absent much of the time

Many smaller holdings are held by newcomers on a treechange & with little fire knowledge or experience

In order to develop community strategic fire management plans and influence these people of such varied background & interests a scenario must be created where they all wish to learn before it can effectively proceed.

Only then can knowledge be “sold” and cooperation enhanced.

The destruction of Yarloop is certainly an event which has triggered some interest.

In order to take this further there are useful strategies to arouse interest in the community:

A likelihood of financial benefit for enhancement of property fire preparedness.

Either council rate or insurance reductions scaled to an assessment of the fire readiness.

An appeal to the ego. Recognition with or without financial reward.

Perhaps district fire preparedness awards then leading on to a regional scale of competition.

The Tidy Towns model could be modified to focus on fire resilience for rural properties.

Seminars or Expos which can be used by community groups for local fundraising purposes and which feature presenters who are in themselves drawcards are a great vehicle for extension.

Possibilities exist for commercial sponsors to support such.

Opportunities for: Chemical companies

Fencing (electric) specialists

Goat breeders

Horticulturists

Insurers

Machine sales & service, pumps, chainsaws etc

Once interest is aroused, then in order to collate & present all of the information for a holistic approach to fire preparedness there would need to be a draw on multiple agencies including DAFWA & RSPCA:

A possible approach would be the formation of an overarching rural fire body to collate all relevant data from all bodies & present to country residents.

Reference WESTPLAN Fire page 44 7.5 Appendix E

“DFES Role the development and implementation of state-wide community engagement and community education programme

One does not expect DFES to have knowledge of herbicides, grazing management, electric fences and animal welfare issues.

The Dept of Food & Agriculture has long involvement with rural life and have excelled at extension.

They are well aware of the rural networks that are interwoven through every rural community.

“Micks”, masons, sportsmen, service clubs, CWA, St Johns, P&C, Landcare and so on.

Local Volunteer Bushfire Brigades are supported by these social networks which enhance their ability to communicate & collaborate.

With any fire incident escalating to a serious level the incident management may be most effective if this local network is left to run the show with oversight & guidance only when needed from DFES.

### **Point 3**

Reforms: Such legislative or regulative changes as may be needed to remove impediments hindering fuel load management burns

#### **Bush Must Be Cool Season Burned**

It is a widely publicised fact that our Australian bush evolved with indigenous fire used carefully to manage the environment. Smoke and ash beds are a necessary part of the life cycle for many native plants.

Development in Australia has allowed varying personal views dictate our forest management with a resultant build up of fuel loads.

No bush does well when exposed to a catastrophic firestorm.

Native animals like the Numbat are just incinerated in such fires.

It is vitally important that we return all of our bushlands to something like the indigenous system of mosaic burning.

Hot enough to get the trash burnt.

Cool enough to be controllable and slow enough to allow wildlife to move on unscathed.

It is feasible that residents & volunteers should be useable with a little training to assist professional work crews with such a burning programme.

Perhaps “BURN FOR THE DOLE” given accredited supervision available!!!

Whether it be DEC, Forest Products, DPaW or Water Corp these bureaucratic organisations must realise it is the residents who lose all in these fires and should welcome any voluntary effort to avert the fire danger before summer.

**Failure to act on reducing bush fuel loads will have an inevitable result in yet another unstoppable, cataclysmic firestorm bursting from the bush as a tsunami of flame, smoke & embers.**

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM  
Special Inquirer  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Sir

#### SUBMISSION TO WAROONA BUSHFIRE SPECIAL INQUIRY

I am the owner and manage a 100 hectare property at [REDACTED] Wagerup, and breed beef cattle for sale generally as weaners.

My property sustained serious fire damage during the recent Waroona fires, losing some 70 – 80% of boundary and internal fences and 70% of paddocks were extensively burnt destroying what feed was available for my cattle. Various tree lines, essential for cattle shade during summer, were also extensively burned. At the time of the fire, I had 84 cattle on the property including 57 breeding cows for which calving was imminent. These cattle were left without fencing and feed for several days. Were it not for the assistance of a neighbour, the hayshed, machinery shed and living quarters would also have been burned. I therefore respond to your enquiry as one who has been severely affected by the fires.

I respond to those terms of reference which I believe are relevant to my own circumstances.

1. The response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire
  - a - The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities

My property is situated on the western boundary of the Harvey River Main Drain. I routinely prepare firebreaks annually to protect my property. The growth on the river bank land immediately adjacent to the boundary of my property, which I believe is government land, is not controlled in any way. Over the years there has been a prolific build-up of *Watsonia meriana bulbifera* which is green during the winter months, but dries out in the summer to present a fire risk. I believe that the presence of this dried fuel was a very real reason as to why that boundary fence line was totally burnt out and destroyed, also allowing the fire to spread further across my property.

- c – The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire

On Saturday 9 January, the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner appeared on a local news bulletin justifying the decision not to call on extra assistance from the Eastern States on the basis that “we are not incompetent”. I flew over my property in the Channel 7 helicopter on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>. I subsequently gained access to my property – against government advice and intent – on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> of January, and noted that during the intervening period, significant further damage had been sustained. Had better fire-fighting strategy been applied, I believe that my property

and many others could have been protected from fire damage. I would have expected all available resources would have been marshalled to address this fire emergency, this does not appear to have been the case.

d – The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance

My previous comment is relevant here. I would, however, like to make mention of the excellent work of the fire-fighters. On Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January a further section of my property ignited. A neighbour and I attempted to control this, but finally resorted to calling 000. The response from fire-fighters was excellent. Not only did they attend the initial call out with several units to fight the fire, but visited several times over the next few days to check on the property and extinguish new sections as they broke out.

I can make no such positive comment about the response or coordination through Fire and Emergency Services. Indeed none of these agencies gave any consideration to the welfare of livestock, even to the point of refusing trucks with hay and fodder entry to collection points where there was no threat of fire or harm to anyone.

f – The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors.

Some of the public messaging has been excellent, and in particular, the Western Power advice on reconnection times. The Geosciences Australia Sentinel map was also extremely helpful, showing where new fire outbreaks were occurring.

The majority of messaging and communication generally by the police, DFES and Parks and Wildlife has been at best sporadic and ineffectual. I received no text warning on my mobile phone at any time, and yet I was not permitted access to the property on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January. The police attending the Pinjarra road block said that my Wagerup property was south of Waroona and therefore unsafe. Indeed, this same team refused me permission to attend the public meeting to be held in Waroona on that day. This was extremely distressing for me as I knew nothing about the state of my farm or the welfare of my livestock.

The public messaging from DFES on their website spoke about the need for landowners to defend their property. I was not on my farm when the fire was first reported publicly, and was then denied access. I was therefore given no opportunity to defend my property, and it does not appear as if there was any attempt to control the fire on my property or the surrounding area at this time, through aerial or other means. It also appeared during this time as if the granting of access to properties was haphazard and inconsistent. A neighbour was granted access on the basis of needing to feed stock. I was refused access on this basis or to attend a community meeting in Waroona. My concern was so great that on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January I entered against advice using lesser known access routes. Despite no power, which meant no refrigeration, running water, light or cooking capacity, I was then unable to leave my property for a further several days in case I was prevented from returning by poorly informed police officers.

The messages about entry were far from clear. The DFES website directed readers to a phone number, which when called redirected them back to the website or advised them to ring 000 in the event of an emergency. The road closure information made little sense to me in some cases as street names were misspelled, and it was not possible to determine where access was limited. As access was reopened, there was no coordinated communication about this in the media. Indeed, for some days the road blocks were still in place but it was unclear as to the criteria for allowing entrance. Quite clearly there was a lack of local knowledge and co-ordination in the government's response to this very sorry saga

## 2. Lessons learned from previous bushfire emergencies

a – The extent to which the findings and recommendations of the following Western Australian bushfire reviews undertaken since 2011 have been implemented.

I have only referred to these reports in recent weeks, and in a relatively cursory fashion, but it seems to me as if very few lessons, if any, have been learned from previous experiences.

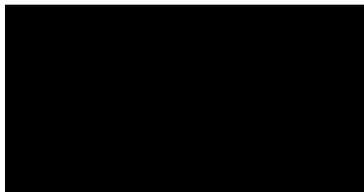
## Conclusion

I have found this experience extremely distressing and in my view it has found the government's response to such an emergency as totally inadequate. I have lost large amounts of pasture, fencing and tree lines on my farm, and the outlook for future years is not positive. Since the fire, 33 of my cattle have calved, losing 2 cows and several calves. I attribute this in part to the stress of the fire. I have since gaining access to my farm been working assiduously to secure the property and provide feed and water for my stock – all this following one of the worst winters for pasture and water storage on record.

The effects of the fire remain. I am of the firm belief that if a fire-break had been prepared on the banks of the Harvey River main drain, my property would not have been burned to the extent that it was. I am also of the view that if Eastern States offers of assistance had been accepted and called on sooner, most, if not all, of the damage to my property, and many thousands of hectares of farmland that was also burnt could have been prevented. Most importantly however, with the absence of proper fire-breaks on government land and the effective implementation of fire-fighting strategies, I would have appreciated the chance to defend my property. This fundamental right was denied me.

I would be happy to speak to my submission subject to the dates of such hearings.

Yours sincerely



## 3. The need for further reform

There is an urgent and significant need for reform within DFES (formerly FESA) and this has been the case for at least the 10 years I've been a volunteer with the WA SES.

DFES are an ongoing experiment in emergency management that is continually failing. An experiment that is unnecessary when it is clear that the rest of Australia is doing it better and has done so for some time.

The clear difference I see between DFES and all other equivalent bodies in Australia is the structure and legislation surrounding the WA emergency services and the lack of improvement from acknowledging and learning lessons from other experiences across Australia.

In order to improve the response to bushfire emergencies, I submit the following recommendations. That:

1. The WA emergency services are restructured so that each emergency service is an independent service reporting to its chief officer.
2. The WA SES structure, budget and staff are supported by legislation.
3. Introduce minimum experience standards for key staffing position in the SES.
4. A comprehensive Emergency Management Manual is created and made easily accessible to staff and volunteers.
5. An SES Liaison forms part of the Incident Management Team (IMT) in all operations where the SES are involved.
6. SES volunteers are always managed and controlled by SES volunteers or SES staff.
7. A repository/database of debriefs to all emergencies in WA is introduced that is accessible by staff and volunteers.
8. WA SES introduce Staging Area Management (SAM) training and equipment similar to interstate SES counterparts to improve bushfire support.
9. Each Local Government Area via their LEMC create a SAM plan that identifies logical places where these functions would be located.
10. Radio telecommunications equipment and networks of WA emergency services are updated so as to simply and seamlessly move between inter service and interstate operations.
11. All SES vehicles identified for bushfire support operations be appropriately equipped, maintained and supported.

# Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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## **1. The WA emergency services are restructured so that each emergency service is an independent service reporting to its chief officer.**

The structure of DFES does not, has not and will not allow for the successful management of emergencies including bushfires. No other emergency management organisation in Australia is similar. Other States and Territories have been down a similar path that DFES is still following and discarded it years ago as unworkable. I have addressed this in detail in my submission to the Legislative Review on 30 April 2013 and my submission to the Concept Paper on 31 July 2014. I have attached these for your reference.

For brevity, the key points are that:

- DFES has turned itself into a response agency when it should be a coordinating agency
- There are no SES staff or SES structure
- SES functions are functions of the Commissioner according to the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998.
- DFES senior management continually assume that a manager of one emergency service is able to manage the operations of another emergency service.
- The focus on fire services in the title of the organisation and throughout the organisation
- The watering-down of the other emergency services, particularly the SES, by reducing their funding (or expenditure), culture and identity and limiting the public exposure they receive.

All other States and Territories have emergency response organisations either as distinct services coordinated by an umbrella organisation or a completely separate organisation.

I firmly believe that changing to a structure as I (and many others) have suggested for some time would ensure the most comprehensive improvement to emergency management and response across ALL emergencies within WA.

## **2. The WA SES structure, budget and staff that are supported by legislation.**

The SES currently has no structure or staff in the Department. Some of the District Officers (DO's) are former SES staff, but the limited number of these positions (when compared with other services) ensure that they are unable to provide adequate input to the significant number of reviews, groups and committees that are occurring throughout the Department.

Often, these groups may not even be aware that SES input should be sought because of the limited understanding of the SES amongst the fire services.

By having its own organisational structure, the SES would be in a position to provide appropriate expertise and advice and make appropriate recommendations to emergency management in WA in support of its roles and functions. It would also be in a position to provide appropriate support to its volunteers in a meaningful way without prioritising other services' issues as currently occurs.

This SES structure must be supported by legislation. This legislation must enshrine the functions of the SES and create key staff and their responsibilities.

I have expanded on this in my submissions to both the Legislative Review in April 2013 and the Concept Paper in 2014 (attached).

# Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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I have heard arguments that to do this would be costly, would lead to duplication, and less interoperability across the emergency services. These arguments are incorrect and not backed up by any evidence.

With respect to the cost issue, WA currently have around 2000 volunteers across approximately 64 SES Units. In contrast, the ACT SES has around 250 volunteers across 7 SES units and they have an independent SES structure with its own budget and staff. Tasmania also have less volunteers and units than WA and also have a significant number of staff, their own structure and own budget. NTES and SA are similar again. Victoria and NSW have independent and completely separate SES organisations.

All these organisations clearly believe that their structure is cost effective. DFES believe that it would not be if this was implemented here. I have seen no evidence to support that view.

With respect to interoperability and duplication, I have yet to see any credible evidence provided by DFES that would support the concerns DFES have about returning to an SES structure.

I also addressed these issues in the attached documentation. Namely, the *Submission to the Legislative Review* and the *Concept Paper - Submission of Comments* (both attached).

### **3. Introduce minimum experience standards for key staffing positions in the SES**

Minimum experience of key personal must be supported and enforced to ensure the positions do not become career paths for fire brigade staff. This has occurred on numerous occasions in SES organisations throughout Australia.

This will ensure that SES management maintain credibility amongst the volunteers, staff and other services and ensure that SES interests are pursued for the betterment of the community.

### **4. A comprehensive Emergency Management Manual is created and made easily available to staff and volunteers.**

There is not one location or document in WA where you can find out which agencies are involved in all the known types of emergency operations. This information is scattered throughout a number of organisations. This information is located across many separate documents, across a number of organisations and even exist in different versions.

An emergency management manual would resolve this issue and a number of other issues surrounding roles and functions of various services in WA.

It would also mean that all services are playing off the same rule book which they are not at the moment, in particular with respect to bushfire operations.

A good example of an emergency management manual is the Victorian Emergency Management Manual and I have attached this for your reference.

# Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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## **5. An SES Liaison forms part of the Incident Management Team (IMT) in all operations where the SES are involved.**

While this may be stating the obvious, this simply does not occur in bushfire operations that I have been involved with. During any emergency operation it is critical that each agency/organisation that has resources invested in an emergency must have a liaison officer in the IMT.

This will ensure that the IMT are not making presumptions or assumptions about what another service can or can't do. This recommendation alone would solve many tactical issues that SES volunteers have raised during bushfire response operations.

The SES liaison officer must be experienced in SES operations and have a good knowledge of SES capabilities (both local and regional). Often, the local SES unit might be in the best position to nominate the liaison officer and in many cases it may fall to the Local Manager of the SES unit.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that this does fall into an expectation that only a Local Manager can perform the role. The SES is not a rank-based response organisation. What I mean by this is that SES volunteers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and that the Team Leader (by rank) may not necessarily be the one leading the team. It varies depending on the operation. Not all Team Leaders are experts in each SES operation. Local Managers often participate in teams in the field and remove their rank epaulettes to avoid any confusion over who is in control of the team.

So while Local Managers may be a good choice in some circumstances, an unranked member might be just as appropriate.

## **6. SES volunteers are always managed and controlled by SES volunteers or SES staff.**

I identified several issues that occurred at the Boddington fire that related to SES volunteers being re-tasked in the field by non-SES volunteers and staff. This resulted in SES volunteers being put into dangerous and unsafe operations. This was mainly due to a lack of knowledge of those in the fire services not being aware of the skills, training and operations of the SES.

## **7. A repository/database of debriefs to all emergencies in WA is introduced that is accessible by staff and volunteers.**

The purpose of this repository would be collate debriefs across all emergencies and keep them in a format that has not been "filtered" through staff or department interests.

I am not aware of any compilation or repository of emergency response or operational debrief information collated anywhere in WA. This is absolutely critical information and I liken it to the aviation industry. The only reason Australia has such a safe aviation industry is because hard lessons were learnt in the past, improvements made and these lessons are incorporated into the training of engineers, managers and flight crew.

This does not happen in emergency management in WA and along with the structure of DFES is, I believe, the second most important factor as to why the responses to emergencies shows no improvement.

DFES lacks the ability to capture, interpret and disseminate the information so that improvements may be made. If this ability was present then many of the tactical issues would be resolved for the

## Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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next incident, while strategic issues (legislation, structure etc) could be put in motion. This is clearly not the case. This view is supported by my debrief from the Boddington fires (attached) and the lack of improvement in the areas I and others identified.

This repository must be accessible to all staff and volunteers to submit debriefs, review and search for information relating to emergencies.

Personally, I have submitted a number of debriefs to DFES relating to a number of response operations and I suspect that these didn't go anywhere except into the incident file never to be seen again. I'm not aware of any of these issues having been addressed or resolved. I am aware of these same issues arising in the fires that this inquiry is reporting on.

It is my opinion that these issues are not addressed for several reasons.

1. fire services do not receive/recognise debriefs from the SES
2. fire services do not prioritise bushfire support issues of the SES
3. there is no incentive to solving the issues that the SES experience
4. those reviewing bushfire operations have little or no experience or knowledge of SES capabilities and functions during bushfires.

This, again, is a reflection of the structure of DFES. There are no SES staff in DFES, so the SES do not get appropriate consideration or input into reviews, committees and the numerous other forums that occur during work hours. That leaves only fire available to provide comment to these groups resulting in the outcomes we have today.

In short, similar issues seem to occur again and again with little or no improvement.

### **8. WA SES introduce Staging Area Management (SAM) training and equipment similar to interstate SES counterparts to improve bushfire support.**

Staging Area (SA) is the term used to describe the setup of various functions in a given location or area in support of bushfires (or any emergency). These functions may include:

- First Aid
- Vehicle maintenance / workshop
- Catering
- Stores
- Fuel Store
- Heli-base
- Ablutions
- Traffic management signage for the above and the SA itself
- any other function that supports the operation

The management of SA's is the consideration that is given to the relative locations of these functions to each other and the overall flow of emergency workers through these functions. It is also maintaining these sites during operations.

In WA, this function is not identified and no service is seemingly responsible for it. This is probably why it is poorly done and does not improve.

# Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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Historically, the SES perform these roles in other parts of Australia not only because they are good at it, but because they are not combating the fire directly and having to divide their resources. This ensures that the limited fire fighting resources are not over-committed.

This is unlike WA where fire services (FRS, VFRS, BFS and DPAW) have little or no resources allocated to SAM. SAM is also a relatively small part of the response (from their perspective) and therefore does not rate as a priority for resources or improvement.

Several States have dedicated training and equipment to enable appropriate management and deployment.

I have observed that IMT's do not allocate appropriate consideration to SAM. They seem to be viewed as a frustration to the real work of fighting fires.

Simply put, fire services should manage combating the fire, while the SES should manage the support. I know that this would have a direct and positive impact in bushfire operations.

## **9. Each Local Government Area via their LEMC create a SAM plan that identifies logical places where these functions would located.**

By having these prepared for emergencies, it will reduce the time it takes to "catch up" in the initial hours of an incident. This simple process would reduce the time it takes to set up SA's and ensure they are laid out in a logical manner. It would also allow traffic management to be put in place in a timely manner enabling the confusion of arriving crews to be removed.

LEMC's would take into consideration the facilities available and how they are accessed, what resources are available and can develop local processes and procedures to ensure facilities are made available and set up in a timely manner.

This would also contribute to a more effective and efficient turnaround of crews and their vehicles so they can get back to combating the fire quicker and more effectively.

## **10. Radio telecommunications equipment and networks of WA emergency services are updated so as to simply and seamlessly operate between inter service and interstate operations.**

The current radio systems are inadequate and not intuitive to volunteers. While The networks that DFES utilise do not meet the needs of staff and volunteers in responding to emergencies.

When managing emergencies, it is important that those performing particular functions (planning, logistics, operations etc) can talk directly to each other irrespective of their location.

The current communications system is based on locations and not functions. So responders are limited to by only being able to talk to those in a similar location (within the repeater or channel coverage area).

A trunked radio network removes this limitation by enabling groups to talk no matter where they are located as long as they are within range of the network. This allows managers to organise your communications in line with your IMT - by function rather than location.

# Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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User limitations of the existing radio communications networks operated by DFES are:

- operators must memorise, ask someone else (if they remember) or carry a map with a decode to identify which channel to use on the radio
- operators must recall how to change modes and channels in the radio after not having used them for months
- significant differences in operation of radio equipment from handheld to vehicle mounted radios.
- different handheld radio equipment in use.

A trunked radio network simplifies the user operation in that operators are not required to recall how to change between UHF and VHF transmission or any other mode of communication or recall what area they are in which determines the channel to use. They simply select a "talkgroup".

While this type of system works well in built up areas, NSW and Qld operate this system and they have resolved the issues relating to remote and distant areas.

This is a system I was involved in introducing to the ACT SES in 2004/2005 as a result of the inquiry into the 2003 fires in the ACT. Since its introduction, I am not aware of any interoperability issues where the system limited the response. This system allows for ACT, NSW and Queensland responders to seamlessly integrate their communications.

It also allows for monitoring of the system to determine if additional infrastructure is required.

In 2011, the federal Senate Standing Committee on the Environment and Communications completed an inquiry titled, *The capacity of communication networks and emergency warning systems to deal with emergencies and natural disasters (can be found [here](#))*.

This inquiry received an number of submission including one from FESA (now DFES).

Several submissions make for interesting reading. Particularly, the ones from companies with respect to public warnings being issued. A number of submissions were received identifying technologies existing back then that would solve issues seen in bushfire events since 2011. In fact FESA had agreed to participate in trialling of one of these systems, but subsequently it was not pursued by FESA.

Recommendation 1 from the inquiry is as follows:

**2.11        *The committee recommends that interoperability of narrowband voice radio communications between federal, state and territory emergency service organisations is achieved as soon as practicable and that all services attending major incidents be compelled to maintain a common emergency communications platform to ensure seamless real time communication from and to the Incident Controller.***

At this time, I don't believe radio communications in WA have progressed to meet the recommendation above.

**11.All SES vehicles identified for bushfire support operations be appropriately equipped, maintained and supported.**

## Submission to Public Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire

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SES vehicles have been (and continue to be) tasked to bushfire support operations without appropriate safety equipment.

There seems to be little progress on issues that have affected bushfire (and other) operations. It was identified that the PC's used on the fire ground needed fire blankets to protect occupants from a flash over. Only one fire blanket was issued to each vehicle, while DFES's own requirements are that there is one per person in the vehicle.

The training that was supposed to accompany the equipment was sporadic and this resulted in volunteers being unaware that more were needed or even how to use them.

How does this happen in an effectively managed organisation?

This is another example of a poorly managed process which I believe is simply another symptom of the structure of DFES.

### **So if there are obvious solutions to issues, why are the issues not being resolved or solutions implemented?**

Hopefully, this inquiry will be able to answer this question.

Not only have many issues been identified in several inquiry's in WA, but there have been numerous inquiries, particularly in the ACT, NSW and Victoria following significant bushfire emergencies. The recommendations from these inquiries are excruciatingly similar and it's no wonder that so many experienced volunteers shake their heads in disbelief and have so little confidence in the current management of emergencies in WA.

I sincerely hope that this inquiry will promote real change within emergency management in WA and lead to significant improvements in the way not only bushfires are managed, but the emergency services are structured and the legislation that supports them.

Best of luck.

██████████  
██████████

3 March 2016

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██████████

**Bushfire management in Western Australia and role of the Forest Products  
Commission and the forest products industry**  
**A submission to the inquiry into the Waroona bushfire of January 2016**  
**(ToR 3: Need for further reform)**

By [REDACTED]

*(Forester, member of IFA, member of Bushfire Front and former employee of FPC and CALM)*

**Summary:**

This submission focuses on a single topic only: the role of the Forest Products Commission (FPC) and the forest products industry with respect to bushfire management in the south west of WA.

The issue is that the FPC, a small government trading enterprise, and the roading and harvesting sectors of the forest products industry which it promotes, collectively comprise a significant resource which is not being fully utilised for bushfire pre-suppression activities and bushfire suppression.

The recommendation is that the FPC should be reincorporated into the State's land and wildlife management agency (Department of Parks and Wildlife or DPaW) and that all timber harvesting, roading and relevant silvicultural contractors working under contract for the FPC should be trained and accredited for bushfire control works and formally incorporated into readily available fire control resource lists.

**Background and supporting comments:**

- Due to public focus on perceived conflicts of interest over management of the State's forests and sale of native forest logs (particularly from "old growth forests"), the FPC was created in 2000 as a separate agency following the disintegration of the former integrated land management agency known as the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).
- The result has been a steady loss to the State's bushfire management capabilities of a cadre of experienced foresters, and the separation of a significant pool of harvesting contract machinery and operators from DPaW.
- Because harvesting in "old growth forests" ceased in WA in 2001 and because the public and political focus on native forest harvesting is now negligible, there is little need for FPC to operate as a small agency in its own right.
- It would be logical for the FPC to become a division or business unit within DPaW, with all FPC staff once again integrated into the bushfire management resources of that land management agency.
- The "rejoining" of FPC and DPaW would once again bring all FPC roading, harvesting and other relevant contractors under the umbrella of DPaW for bushfire control purposes.

Dear Sir,

Firstly thankyou from myself and many,

In taking part as a person of interest and a person in charge, of a thorough investigation into the activities which surrounded the catastrophic fires of the south west of western Australia in January 2016

My personal experience of the days that were, what I witnessed and what I felt.

In trying to be responsible and knowing that a raging bushfire is always unpredictable we made a safety decision to evacuate the children and our dog away from the local area.

My husband and I stayed to defend our property and livestock, so I fought the fires on the front line each day and night.

The most important part that everyone needs to be aware is my husband and I fought fires on family's property, friends property and strangers property. Property's who were owned by people I have never met and may never meet. The focus was to extinguish the fire as best we could regardless of where it was.

My name is [REDACTED], [REDACTED] who lives on a farm with my husband and 2 children in Cookernup. We manage a dairy farm with my father in law, beef cattle, horses and I also work a 40 hour week for a livestock software company. We also run cattle on 3 separate blocks in the Harvey Hills.

With just staying on track with what I personally encountered, I was upset on several occasions on some events and even disgusted, which of course led to disappointment.

I have shared many stories with various friends, who also took part in staying behind to help protect and defend. There are so many stories told of how things went so terribly wrong. The following events were, what I was personally involved in, from my point of view, none of the following is 'here say'

The day after Yarloop was devastated by the fire we were fighting fires on the western side of our property. The communication between fellow farmers was exceptional, even though Telstra suffered some intermittent outage issues. Everyone was always on the phone discussing the location of new fires and grouping together to fight the ones that were headed for homes and livestock.

The first home we saved was with two farm units and only four people. It was heading in a strong easterly direction and Cookernup was in its path and was potentially Harvey.

The next property we defended was our neighbouring property. We saved a hay shed and yards and cattle, this was fought with a tractor and discs, another tractor with discs, a water truck (private) and our farm unit. We then moved onto the next property and saved a homestead and horses, with our farm unit and a loader.

We then moved onto the next property in a convoy, which consisted of two farm units, a loader, and the same water truck. This was the first time we saw fire trucks, but instead of feeling relief, we felt disgust as they were all stationary, parked in a neat half circle, facing the fire and taking photos of the fire or themselves with their mobile phones. We looked over and saw farm fire units, fighting the front of the fire. Not one fire truck was in the fire line assisting these farmers. We left shaking our heads and moved onto the next property.

We came home to re-fuel the vehicle, re-fuel the water pump and fill the tank with water. As we were filling the water tank, nightfall was setting in and again we received the call.

Three fires were burning again on the western side of us but now south of the previous fires. It was burning out of control under a power line and was fiercely burning along the Harvey river drain. There was no fire trucks to be seen anywhere. We know they were in the area and now hundreds of trucks in the area as many other towns in WA had deployed them. We also knew fellow fire fighters were flown in from eastern states, as relief crew.

We flew into the fire and fought hard, so did many other farmers. Should it keep going as fierce as it was, there was no stopping it's path into Harvey which is a very large township. Without a doubt we needed more water. With none in sight, I was forced to call 000. As quick as I could – I gave location and fire. "the fire is burning out of control and we need fire trucks ASAP" and so on.

We continued to fight and farm units were running out of water and had to leave the fire to refill with water. We had new water and we once again fought this fire. After a very long period we began to see fire trucks, flashing lights and although they were now deployed to the area, not one single truck entered a fire. Not one single truck entered a property to attempt to fight this fire. Another call to 000, "all those trucks you have cruising down government road, tell them to come into these properties and fight this fire – WE NEED WATER"

Fighting still and no trucks. Time to come home and re-fill with water again and by now I have given up on 000 and getting fire trucks to assist. Exhausted although sensible to know we can no longer "stop" this fire without assistance....

Time to refill water again and I ask my husband to stop dead on the government road, I jump out and I stand in the middle of the road, middle of the night and I stop every single fire truck and ask them to go here and go there, dressed in farm shorts and singlets and have no indication I am involved in the brigade. By

11:30pm I could look across at the properties and can see enough blue and red lights spread around within the fires to feel protected enough, we could then attempt to go have a shower and find something to eat for the day.

Now as far as I am aware the emergency services have the best radio network in Australia (I know this because I was a volunteer fire fighter for many years in other states) What happened to the chain of command for the trucks not to be ordered to enter private property, yet I could stand on the road and give direction and EVERY TRUCK followed my exact orders.

I believe these fire trucks have the utmost training and the best of the best technology, so my question is why??

Why did such a vast area be completely destroyed by fire and why when we utmost needed our emergency services, did the ones who stayed behind, who helped saved so much more, be forced to call the one number we all hope never to call....

It also needs to be noted here in relation to the road closures.

I fully understand implementing police maned closures for the safety of other people, however, it was a power issued authority war from a huge majority of the staff managing these. Several occasions I had to stop and explain my reasons for movement (which I was happy to abide), but, when we were taking emergency supplies to distribute to animals housed in a fully burnt out area (which was not in danger due to nothing left) was ridiculous (especially when we were returning home to a possibly dangerous area). We were proven locals helping locals and providing a duty of care to manage and protect the welfare of animals. In one instance we were told to turn around, we had to get friends (who lost everything) to drive to our place hook on the trailer full of supplies, take it back to their property, unload it, return to us and unhook again at our place and only because their road block had decent humans managing their road block and understood the details and reasons for their trip.

On another occasion I will happily admit I drove through a road block consisting of blocks and cones with a cattle truck as I was abused by road workers because I was unable to reason with them, when I was heavily loaded with 9 tonne of cattle moving them for obvious safety reasons. I could go on for another page, safety is safety and I agree it should be a top priority, but there was no reason with some of these people and it just made it harder for the ones here, who worked day and night tirelessly to defend our livestock and property.

I know the focus of this enquiry is devoted to the Waroona & Yarloop January fires, with many stories of people's encounters just like my own and I have heard so many others share their stories since and sad fully to the same level of disappointment and unjust activities.

With this noted when the fires began again so very close at Wokalup the exact same date in February, you would only hope and assume, lessons were learnt.

This fire personally was the worst fire I have ever fought in my life. I won't write another essay on this fire, but once again my husband and I and the same familiar farmers faces, were again out there on the fire front line saving what we could for those we could. One house, farm, livestock and dairy we saved (which again was headed straight for Harvey/Wokalup townships), as just one example of the days we spent there, consisted of on the ground, 12 private farm units, 2 farm tractors with discs and I can tell you now, there was not one single fire truck of any colour or government body to be seen anywhere. We were not fighting a little grass fire away from the heart we were in the heart, because the aerial crew were directly above us.

I can only hope that we never encounter such a catastrophic fire or natural disaster, as what we have experienced at the start of this year, ever again in our life time and it is so unfortunate with the events that took place that it totally breaks my heart, to think that such a communication and operational shemozzle could possibly again repeat itself, so not because of the disaster itself but because of the happenings, we maybe, just maybe, next time.... Might not be so lucky....

## SUBMISSION TO PUBLIC INQUIRY 2016 FIRE IN WAROONA AREA

In my opinion the DFES fire information system is completely incompetent, to the extent that it is dangerous.

In early 2016, I have had a number of occasions to attempt to use the DFES website and associated ABC notifications.

On one occasion there was a fire near the intersection of Tonkin Hwy and Orrong Road in Wattle Grove.

I was concerned as I have a property nearby. The website was not updated for hours, so I went to the lookout on Honey Rd to observe. I listened to the ABC telling us the fire was moving in an easterly direction, threatening Crystal Brook Road, when it was quite plain it was moving northerly and threatening Forrestfield. Hopeless.

The second occasion was when a fire in Lane Poole reserve south of Nanga was started by lightning. Because this was not dealt with immediately (obviously a serious failure in hot January) it developed into the so-called Waroona fire.

I have a property in Dwellingup, which with SE winds would be under threat from this fire, so I took my fire truck there. The information about the state of that fire was nonexistent, and we sat and watched the smoke until we heard on the news that it had raced westwards overnight, and over a period of several days moved south to take out Yarloop and my farm in Cookernup, which I could not reach because of road blocks.

I believe there is a systemic problem in DFES. These people do not understand that farmers and other landholders have resources and the intention to fight all fires except raging wildfires. DFES seem to have the view that if they announce a fire everyone should clear out, and they deliberately obstruct efforts by us to protect our property and livestock.

We want timely fire information at a vastly enhanced level to that provided at present. With all the aircraft and information and communications technology available there is no excuse for the pathetic performance being delivered.

[REDACTED]

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016



## Waroona Bushfire Special Enquiry

1.

(a) The process of obtaining a Permit to burn is cumbersome. The system would work better if people at local level, farmers etc. were allowed to burn when they saw fit. Establishing an accreditation system that gives authority to these people burn without any other agency having to give approval.

DPaW have a shocking record of managing “controlled” burns and are often slow to react when fire gets out of control by calling in extra help.

DPaW consistently under achieve the amount of pre fire season burns they target doing.

Citizens should be allowed to enter crown land to attack fires when they start.

(b) DFES takes an unfair amount of the blame for what goes on. DFES supplies most of the rural volunteer units with equipment but cannot insist on feedback from those units on any unserviceability that might exist.

There appears to be delineation between volunteers and career firefighters on what they can and cannot use. All equipment needs to be standardised in all aspects so it can switch seamlessly from career to volunteer units and vice versa.

Fire Fighters should fight fires. Currently fire fighters will not engage in fighting fires unless there are obvious assets at risk. A farmers paddock/livestock/shed is an asset to the farmer yet crews will sit back and not help fight a fire burning in a paddock. Redefine the mission statement by stating crews are there to fight fires wherever/whenever they present.

DFES should assume all responsibility for all fires and have sections that specialise in metropolitan and rural fires.

DFES should ensure training given is specific to the task and this would be enhanced by engaging local knowledge.

(c) Fire bomber bases must be able to accommodate basic crews to remove the time consuming necessity to return to Base at the end of every day and then redeploy the next day.

Retardant should be used more in aerial drops and in doing so the cost per unit would come down.

The turning down of the offer of bigger aircraft from the Eastern States, was folly and the Ministers rationale as to why the aircraft were not suitable here in Western Australia was wrong and misguided. Currently we are throwing teaspoons of water at fires and are not following what is happening in other parts of the world by utilising larger aircraft.

(d) DPaW provide oversight at firebomber bases yet some of their personnel lack depth in experience and have been found to be restrictive on the day to day operations carried out. Better specific training required including management skills.

I am a volunteer firebomber loader at the Wheeler Field base at Coolup and was active throughout the fires that started around Waroona.

I would be happy to speak to this matter in person.



I have farmed in the Murray District for 38 years and have never seen a fire as catastrophic as this in this in this area, saying that over the last 8 years we have had three of the worst fires in my memory in the Murray/Waroona districts.

The excuse of global warming and drying climate is a poor one in my opinion, when the rain fall was higher it created more fodder/fuel and the summers were just as dry.

30 years ago we planned for the fire season, most farmers burnt road sides forming much larger fire breaks, we worked with the Railways to burn off Rail reserves again having a good fire break, and other reserves or highly grassed areas were burnt off.

The Rail reserve today has 20 years fuel ready to burn. We were ordered not to burn these areas as it was deemed environmentally harmful and we would be prosecuted if we continued this practise.

In my earlier days of farming we had local farmer fire brigades, with Fire control officers who were generally experienced farmers, we had a contact list of all our neighbours and an inventory of their firefighting equipment, I accept we had no formal training but the experience of fighting localized fires and the knowledge of our elders of the time put us in good stead. We relied on each other and got to the job quickly before it got out of hand.

Some years ago this was disbanded, these small farmer brigades were deemed to be not necessary and if you were not trained to be a Firefighter you were not welcome to help your neighbours out, and the great mistake with this is the use of local knowledge. In discussing the Waroona fire with local members of the community they all said if they were allowed up to where the fire started they were reasonably confident of getting it under control, but were told if they entered crown land they were in danger of being prosecuted, and professional fire fighters from other areas were either not allowed to go in to fight it as they did not have the local knowledge or the higher powers that control these events did not understand the potential of the fire, I would have thought with 40 degree heat and strong winds these departments would get regular updates on the weather and would have acted quicker.

I feel in these fire situations there should be more acceptance of allowing locals who have fire units to help and not be blocked out of their properties , I fully understand there has to be safety measures put into place but having road blocks 20 kilometres from the fire was an over kill of the situation.

Earlier I mentioned the fires some 8 years ago, a number of houses were burnt down and many thousands of hectares of farming land lost, our shire and emergency representative's called a community meeting to discuss how these situations can be better approached, a number of good ideas came out of the meeting , unfortunately nothing was put in place and the review of the fire was a waste of time, in that fire there were a number of similar stories of local units not welcome to help until the fire was out of hand, but when we were let in we played a big role in mopping up and in some cases saving properties .

With the Waroona fire there were a lot of resource's available with the likes of Hull's bulldozers and other machinery that could have had an impact and again have the local knowledge to help out, but were questioned where and when they could be used this doesn't make sense to me .

There needs to be a consultation process between those who can help in the community and the fire controllers so that we can get the best possible outcome in these situations. At the moment there seems to be a them and us situation and a feeling that we the local community are being dictated to by the different departments which causes some anger amongst those affected, we want good reporting on the situation so there can be a bipartisan approach to attacking these fires to get it under control as quickly as possible.

[REDACTED]

Mobile [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

4 March 2016

The following submission has been prepared by members of the [REDACTED] family who were present during the January 2016 fire and relate to certain terms of reference for the public enquiry into the January 2016 Waroona (and Yarloop) Fire.

Clarification of any of the comments can be obtained by contacting [REDACTED] on mobile [REDACTED]

### **Family and Property Background**

The [REDACTED] family (consisting of three families), [REDACTED] own, live and operate beef and sheep properties at Forrest Highway Lake Clifton, Old Coast Road Lake Clifton and Johnston Road Yarloop all in the affected shires of Waroona and Harvey.

All properties owned by the family were extensively affected by the January 2016 fire.

The family has owned these properties since 1946, so we are not new to the district and have been farming all our lives. The properties are used for grazing cattle and sheep and hay conservation, which is our livelihood.

The properties adjacent to Forrest Highway and Old Coast Road which comprises about 700 acres all share common boundaries with either State Forrest and Yalgorup National Park and are dissected by the Forrest Highway and Old Coast Road (Main Roads). To the east of this property is the McLarty Pine Plantation.

The properties at Yarloop comprising of about 800 acres in total, have common boundary farmer neighbors and is mainly cleared farmland.

**1(a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities.**

Historically when our father and his neighbors were managing the coastal properties and because of the proximity to state owned assets (Pine Plantation, National Park and State Forrest), it was always common practice to conduct autumn fuel reductions on certain tracts or areas of the property, including the roadsides. This was carried out on different areas of the property every year and it provided protection for our business and our neighbouring land manager's assets in the event of a major fire.

Over time and with changing government policies, government structures, public pressure and the increasing movement of population into the area, it has become impossible for us to continue to carry out these fuel reduction practices on our own property.

We have encountered resistance, hostility, frustration and red tangled tape from our local district fire brigades when trying to obtain permits when it is a legally permitted burning period in order to carry out these fuel reduction burns and when the right conditions prevail, even though we have demonstrated that we have the necessary equipment to safely carry out control measures and the human resources available to be in attendance at the time.

For as long as we have lived permanently at our current address there has never been any preventative fuel reduction burns in State Forrest and/or Yalgorup National Park where we share a common boundary. No vegetation has been cleared from outside our boundary fence from these management organizations, however every year we are required to maintain an adequate (but not adequate enough in our opinion) firebreaks on our property, which in an event like we have just experienced, provide no protection what so ever. It has been over 40 years since any fuel reduction has been carried out in State Forrest and Yalgorup National Park surrounding our farm and dwellings and you can only imagine how this has contributed to the intensity and loss of private assets from this event.

Every year we receive notification from Department of Parks and Wildlife stating that they will be planning on conducting prescribed burning in areas near our coastal locations, however most years these prescribed burns do not take place because of: (and these are not our reasons)

- Weather conditions (wind & temperature)
- Staffing resources
- Insufficient equipment resources (water tankers, graders, bulldozers)
- Time restrictions

I have included a copy of the standard letter we receive every year and it is interesting to note the statements made in paragraph 2, which conflict with the scenery we have to look at now and the man power and personal cost in cleaning up since the event.

### **1 (b) The effectiveness of emergency management plans and procedures**

On the day prior to the afternoon on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016, we noticed a lot of burnt leaves and vegetative matter being carried by the easterly winds and this was starting to cause concerns for us as the weather forecast was for strong easterly winds for the next 24 hours.

In preparation the next day, family members attended to the most eastern farms and carried out some preventative measures such as constructing new firebreaks and moving some vulnerable pieces of machinery on to sandy unvegetated areas in case conditions got worse and we knew we could not cover all farms with the family members we had available.

By the time we arrived back to the coast on the afternoon of 7<sup>th</sup> January, things did not look good and preparations were put in place to defend dwellings. By about 7pm we knew the situation was not good and that the strong easterly wind was pushing the fire in our direction.

By this time DFES vehicles were driving around, one small unit drove onto the property, drove around, advised us to evacuate and promptly drove away. The fire had broken through the State Forrest to the east of our house and no other assistance was forthcoming. Not one drop of water came from DFES units to assist in protecting our dwelling. My brother whose house is 1km north of my house was not even checked on. While I was defending my house, my wife and children sat in a vehicle in the median of the Forrest Highway, with lights on, waiting for the fire to pass. DFES vehicles were stationed on the corner of Peppermint Grove Road and Forrest Highway, some 300 metres to the south. Not one of them came to see if we were OK or needed any help. Why on earth do we pay a fire levy on our council rates each year? The purpose of this levy is for what? We still do not know what this levy does for the communities of Yarloop and Waroona.

### **1 (c) The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire**

There didn't appear to be any suppression strategies in place once the fire broke through at the coast. By this time it was night and water bombers were not able to be used and we noticed a lot of fire trucks gathered on the Forrest Highway during the event but not carrying out any suppression work, rather waiting and watching until the fire had passed.

At our Yarloop farm, some three days after the fire had gone through, an organization unknown to us, entered our Yarloop farm and used a grader to churn up large tracts of land where there had been no fire, or there was only bare ground and even on a gravel area where there would be no chance of fire effecting anything else. To this day we don't know who authorized this work to be carried out on private property and it will take use at least three days to make good again and return the soil to a natural state.

Our neighbors also experienced the same treatment to their property.

### **1 (e)**

#### **Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency service organizations and the community.**

Living in a remote rural coastal location, the essential services here are limited to power provision and not much else. We as individuals are responsible for providing and maintaining all other services such as water supply, communications and transport. We have backup water delivery, power generation and transport options on hand, however we must say that of all the utility services providers, Western Power have completed a mammoth task in restoring the power supply to the whole affected area.

#### **1(f) The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors.**

It was only at 8.45pm on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016 that I received a text warning me that there was a fire in the area and to prepare to evacuate. By that time the fire had broken through at Lake Clifton and it would have been too late to leave had that been our decision. I knew more about where the fire was the previous day, not that I have ever relied on the text messaging service.

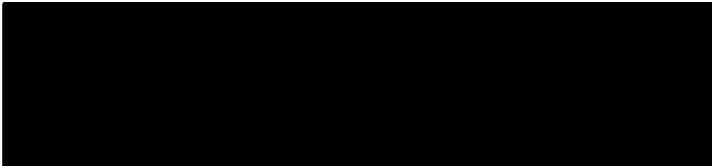
#### **1 (g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire: (iii) Provision of welfare support.**

The day after the event, I believe we had a DFES vehicle arrive on the property, have a look around and drive out again. No attempt was made to locate the owner despite there being a dwelling on site, to see if we were injured or not, or if we needed urgent assistance. Over the next few days various DFES vehicles and trucks patrolled the outer perimeter of the property extinguishing burning timber.

The surrounding communities (private individuals and volunteer groups) have been outstanding in the post fire/recovery assistance. I cannot begin to describe the overwhelming support we have received from these people, community groups and organizations and the work they have done in organizing access to services, food supplies, fuel, livestock aid and still continue to do so well after the event.

Because we operate our cattle and sheep grazing business on both sides of a major highway (Forrest Highway) and most of the fencing was destroyed, the Main Roads Department have been exceptional in their cleanup of fallen vegetation and debris on the Forrest Highway, Old Coast Road and fence lines and whilst we have not had cordial relations with this Department in the past, thanks must go to Alan Grist from Main Roads in arranging a temporary electric fence to be installed along the eastern boundary of the majority of our property adjacent to the Forrest Highway. From a public safety point of view and in light of the fact that we could not obtain suitable fencing material in the interim, this has lifted a burden from our minds so that we can concentrate on other areas.

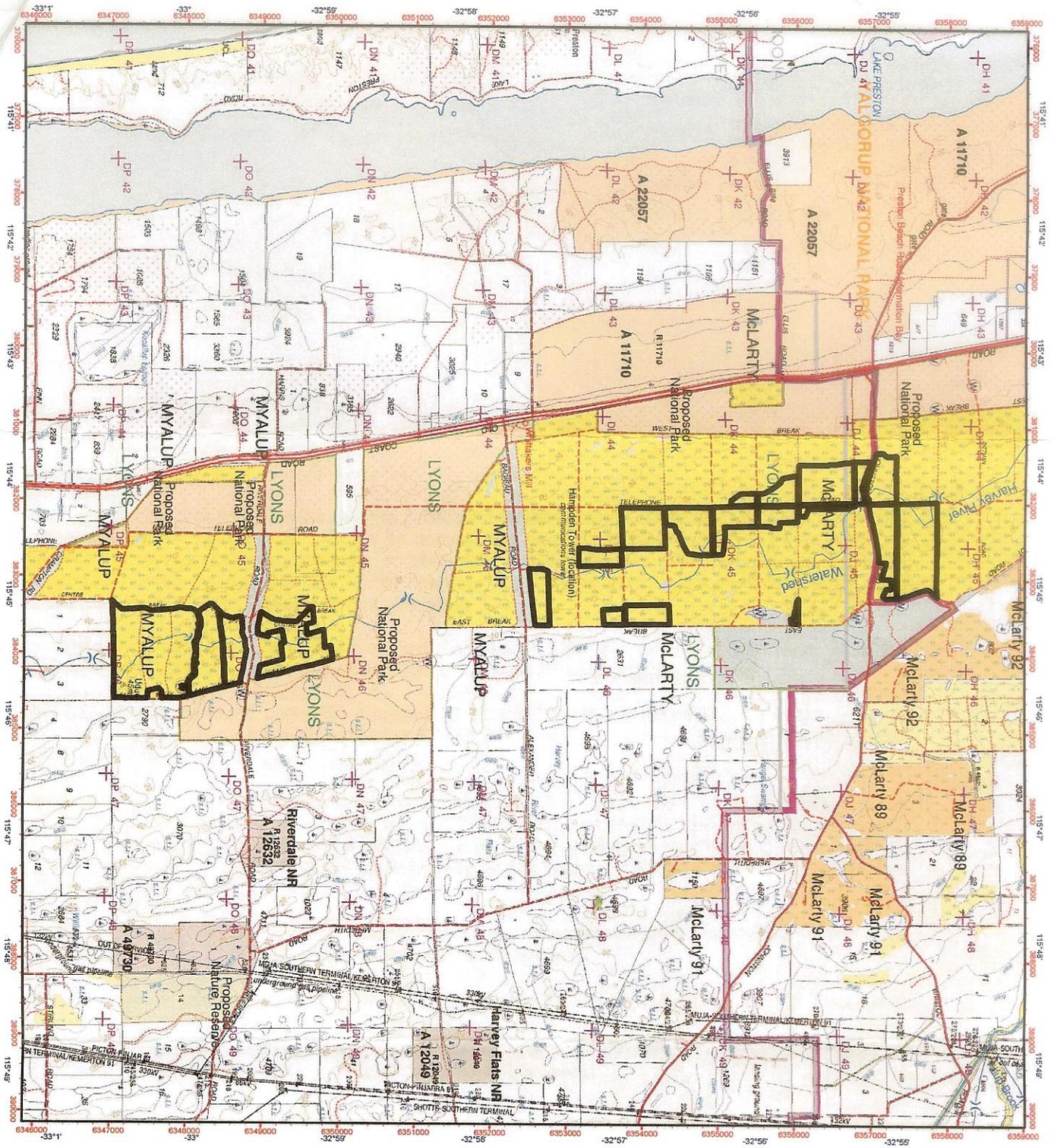
However a major obstacle encountered in order to get to other farms after the event to check on stock, water & feed supplies, was made very difficult by the manned road blocks in place. Even though we could provide identification and evidence of why we needed to go through the blocks, we were treated like criminals when number plates, names and addresses were noted by those manning the road blocks and calls by the police threatening to have charges laid on us for trying to attend to our other properties. This practice has to be changed so that we can check on our other properties after a fire, which is a normal practice on any other given day and more so after a disaster like this one.



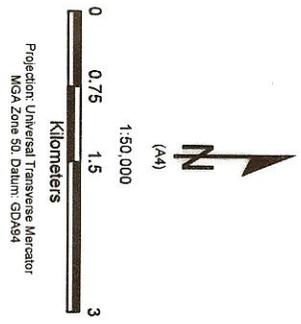
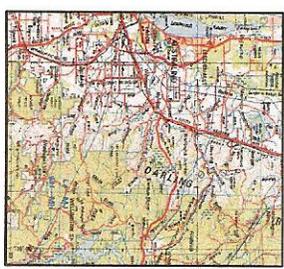
4 March 2016

**Wellington District  
Burn Boundary  
WTN\_019 MCLARTY 801 / MYALUP 802**

Legend  
 Burn Boundary



The Dept. of Parks and Wildlife does not guarantee that this map is without flaw of any kind and disclaims all liability for any errors that may occur. It is recommended that you check the map against the ground and that you take appropriate precautions when using the map for any purpose. The map is for general information only and should not be used for any purpose other than that for which it was prepared. The map is the property of the Department of Parks and Wildlife and its use is restricted to the purposes for which it was prepared. The map is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was prepared. The map is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was prepared.



Produced by Cindy Miller,  
 Department of  
 Parks and Wildlife





Government of Western Australia  
Department of Parks and Wildlife  
Wellington District

Your ref:  
Our ref: 2015/001277/ WTN\_019  
McLarty / Myalup /  
WTN\_019  
Enquiries K Hulls  
Phone: (08) 9735 1988  
Email: wellington@dpaw.wa.gov.au



Dear Landowner

### NOTIFICATION OF PRESCRIBED BURNING

The Department of Parks and Wildlife is responsible for fire management in Western Australia's State Forests, National Parks and Nature Reserves.

The Department uses prescribed burning to reduce the bushfire hazard so as to protect life, community assets and natural values from damage by uncontrolled fires. Prescribed burning is carried out in a manner to maintain biological diversity, habitats and species richness. The Department also uses prescribed burning on behalf of the Forest Products Commission, to establish conditions suitable for native forest regeneration following timber harvesting.

In accordance with the requirements of Part IV, Section 15B (3) and (4) of the Bush Fires Act Regulations, the Department hereby notifies you as a neighbour of its proposals to burn:

The Department intends to undertake a prescribed burn **WTN\_019 McLarty / Myalup** in the vicinity of your property, Wellington location number(s) **2, 205, 334, 350 577, 1287, 5215, 649** in the near future when suitable conditions allow.

This notification is valid for 28 days. You will be re-advised if the burn is going to proceed outside of the initial 28 day notification. An aircraft may be used to ignite the burn and the Department will endeavour to avoid flying below 500 feet over your property. However, it may be necessary to do so and should you have reason to object, please contact the District Fire Coordinator - at the above number to discuss your concerns.

Should you require more specific information, or have any particular concerns about this burn and other burns programmed by the Department please contact this office.

The Wellington District regularly updates the contact information of our neighbours. This information allows us to contact you regarding prescribed burning activities. Currently we have your phone number listed as [REDACTED]. Please contact Cindy Miller on (08) 9735 1988 or [cindy.miller@dpaw.wa.gov.au](mailto:cindy.miller@dpaw.wa.gov.au) if the information we have is incorrect.

Yours sincerely

*Drew Griffiths*

AJ Griffiths  
District Manager  
Wellington District

9 April 2015

## Submission to Waroona Bushfire Enquiry

From: [REDACTED] Ph [REDACTED] (ex CALM worker; ex BFB volunteer: ex farmer in Cookernup; involved with evacuees at the time of the fire: resident of fire prone area that was capable of being attacked by this fire.

Adequacy of warnings.

Verbal by Radio.

ABC emergency warning announcements 6.45am approx..7.1.2016.

Advising people in Waroona on east side of SW Highway it was too late to leave and on the West side of the Highway to leave immediately. Sounded like nonsense as the people on the east relatively adjacent to the Highway could leave by the same routes open to those on the other side of the road. Apparent nonsense is not what should be issued during an emergency.

Giving verbal description of the warning zones using road names as boundaries is very hard to interpret. It is very hard to get an understanding of the fire situation from the garbled road boundaries. Understanding is essential as that is the basis for people to make informed decisions. They are hard for people who know the area well (though when the fire moves as far and as fast as this one very very few would know most of the area well) and almost useless for people outside the zones who may know people inside the zones and be a source of communication and maybe decision making for those inside the zones. Radio delineation of zones works poorly and the alternatives need to be developed. That this is still a problem was evidenced by the warning for the small fire mid Feb for "Brunswick" when the fire was far more relevant to Australind than Brunswick.

Having no roads information from Mains Roads available at this time when the Forrest Hwy was closed was very poor. People get frustrated, make poor decisions and can put themselves at unnecessary risk when information on alternatives is lacking.

The constant repetition of the same information by the radio warnings is counter productive. It gives no insight into the fire situation and it often leaves the impression that the fire situation is not changing even when the fire is out of control. Greater understanding of the fire situation did happen on occasions throughout this fire when people with specific knowledge of the fire (eg. Incident controllers) spoke on radio or when radio announcers used their initiative and "localised the warnings" by explaining what they knew of the fire situation or of the warning zones and what were the changes from the last warning bulletin. Clearly they are most reluctant to take this initiative as they otherwise always stick exactly to the script with its ineffectual message. Solution is to have a fire expert with local knowledge of the area and specific knowledge of the fire (even if second hand from the incident controllers) giving the warnings. Such a network of such persons is more likely to come from ex foresters/ BFB volunteers/ female non firefighting volunteers/shire workers with BFB backgrounds. Such persons are not likely to be bureaucratic "talking heads" from DFES.

The level of warnings.

Alert/ watch and act/ emergency. The repeated explanation of these as part of the warning bulletins cause the actual update message to be lost. People developing an understanding of these warning levels during an emerging emergency is not good. Somehow they need to be taught to the populace of fire prone areas so they are second nature by the time the emergency arises.

The emergency warning “it is too late to leave; leaving will result in death” is questionable. Does it cause panic? How is it compatible with the Yarloop town situation where to stay may have initially seemed the right move but clearly to move out, almost no matter how late that decision was made and acted on, was the better move?

The Maps

The maps of the fire on the DFES internet warning site was poor. First impression was that the only map was the map showing a flame on a vast map of the south west. A call to DEFS still did not indicate that there was a better map hidden away in the most obscure part of the alerts more information under a pdf title that did not reflect the fact that it was a map. After attending two community information sessions at Leschenault Thursday and Friday I learnt from a relative where the fire maps were on the computer site. This inability to locate the fire map was widespread. I then was able to inform at least half a dozen anxious people at Saturday and Sunday meetings of where the maps could be found on the computer and vouch for their accuracy. These included Harvey resident evacuees; people who has relative in the eastern states who were concerned; and relatives (some distance away) of local residents. Yet even then the map was elusive as it disappeared for long periods (presumably for updates) without even a message saying this is where you would normally find the map and “it will reappear soonish”.

When available the map of the fire was good. Clearly more regular updates of the map and retained versions of the old maps on the same page (to give a visual appreciation of the progress of the fire) is needed. The retained versions should at least remain while the updates are done. Having the fire map on a map without roads marked or named was poor. Good accurate maps of the fire with very regular updates will greatly improve the information for the people likely to be affected. Can drones be used for the fire mapping (notwithstanding the negative vibes DFES put out about drones near foregrounds)? For example, if water bombers cannot fly after a certain hour could not the dromes map while the planes are away?

DFES seem to disempower people affected by not providing easily understood detailed information but rather only giving directions and warnings.

The first map of the warning zones I saw was on commercial TV news about a week after the start of the fire. It was instantly obvious that that map was far more informative than the Radio scrips. I note at that for the “Brunswick” emergency of Mid-February 2016 a map of the warning zones with roads names and road closures was on the DEFS site. This is clearly a substantial improvement on the situation at the time of the Waroona fire. If a fire is a real “emergency” (ie rated as such by DFES) surely it is worth those warning zones be available on local TV, facebook, twitter, and DFES site. My preference is local TV (ABC or commercial or both – reality TV of a bushfire emergency can be compelling viewing).

These are logistic issues. I think DFES should be able to handle them but if they are overwhelmed in a lengthy emergency is it not an area where army or army reserves could be trained and deployed as it fits with their skills set.

Firefighting.

The conditions that created the devastating fire were very hot days with very strong easterly winds over a few days and fairly warm nights. These conditions have been around for many years (and I accept the science that says they will be getting worse). The low rainfall will be making the fuel dryer. But the point is that this fire proved uncontrollable when the conditions were not that dissimilar to the past. The review needs to see if anything has changed in the way we fight such a fire that is causing the firefight to be lost and what needs to change in how we fight such a fire. If that fire had reached Leschenault there would have been huge loss.

Only good fire is a small fire. Kill it early. Fire controller advised they went hard early on this fire (and its twin which they put out) but this fire still got away. Did they go hard enough early? Was plan B for the small fire that got away but was not yet huge a strong enough effort. Was sufficient earth moving equipment deployed and was backburning an option or used (these two the tools of choice for large fires from years back)?

Clearly DPAW will need to learn from this fire. At the community meeting 8 pm 7.1.16 it was clear DPAW was very confident they had fully stopped the western spread of the fire half way between SW Hwy and Forrest Hwy and also that Yarloop was relatively safe (even though maps showed the fire close to the NE and a fairly strong easterly was blowing). Both wrong. No blame here only noting that DPAW clearly did not understand the fire behaviour or how to counter it.

I witnessed the fire at 6pm on 8.1.2016 on the N side of Dix Rd Cookernup. Fire was tickling through Italiano's farm and the adjoining forest. Very little wind. Spots of rain. 3 or 4 BFB heavy duty (3/4s) protecting the dairy and house assets and a couple of similar units patrolling Dix road itself. There was Earthmoving plant of some type working adjacent to Dix Rd. There appeared to be no attack in the fire itself even though it seemed a very tame fire then. 3 hours later it had crossed Dix Rd going south expanding the perimeter and going closer to Harvey. What was going on at 6 pm? Should there have been some attempt to restrict the fire? Cannot heavy duty BFB vehicle attack the fire like a light duty could? Were the fire controllers too divorced from the fire front?

Using volunteer BFB on a big fire like this followed a week or so later by a reasonably big Benger fire is not sustainable on the long term. It requires too much commitment (time and dollars lost from work; stress on family relationships; physical exhaustion). People will be wary of volunteering and others will leave. Maybe not in the short term but if big fires become the norm year after year then it is unsustainable. Maybe create a second tier of BFB firefighter who is not first attack but is available for mop up/relief etc. That person would not be required to down tools immediately to respond; would not need to work continuously in 40degree plus heat; could be slightly less fit and less trained etc.

## Access

During fire. DFES rules work poorly when there is industry/livestock in fire zones especially where the fire zones extend for a lengthy period. Better risk assessment needed (eg. The wind changes are relatively predictable so people could be allowed in/ escorted in to inaccessible area when the conditions in that particular area are relatively safe. ie wind pushing fire away from an area.) DFES spokesman said they will always be overly cautious in such things decisions.(maybe they fear a repeat of the Westonia fire tragedy). Is that the correct approach? Aim to make the right decision not the overly cautious one. Being overly cautious is an easy slippery slope to go down.

## Post fires.

People need to get back to "normal" as soon as possible. The effect on their lives both mentally and economically demands this. People need to be able to return to their homes( including burnt ones) farms and to use the roads as soon as possible. The present way of blocking people out seems wrong. People face dangers every day. We drive on the roads in face of immense danger because we are aware of the danger and operate in a way that minimise that danger. People are regularly allowed to face danger in extreme sport. Why is it that a bushfire makes a person so useless that they could not carefully negotiate a heightened level of danger? Limit the time/ limit the speed of travel/ provide escorts/restrict children but do what can be done to allow as much access as possible. Think about allowing access with acceptable level of risk rather than how to restrict access. Not the blanket risk adverse approach of this fire.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Ph: [REDACTED]

4<sup>th</sup> February 2016

**RE: WAROONA BUSHFIRE SPECIAL INQUIRY REQUEST FOR SUBMISSIONS**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I would like the following to be submitted as my response to the Waroona Fires of January 2016. I have included a copy of an email I sent within 6 days of the first fire on the Wednesday night to a DFES staff member who I found to be very helpful. I am sharing this email because I believe, reading back over it a month or so later, makes me realise that some initial points I made then still hold true now.

My personal thoughts and recommendations from the Waroona Fire of 2016 would be:-

- . Place one Local volunteer firefighter in with a foreign crew – use the local knowledge of roads, houses and farms. Don't exhaust 'whole' local bushfire crews especially in their own locations. When foreign crews arrive after the initial fire fighting response, rest up the local crew and then send one local crew member out with the fresh foreign crews.
- . Use local knowledge when mapping fires in country shires – engage the knowledge and expertise of local courier and mail delivery persons. They know all roads and the condition, laneways, houses and usually how many live in that remote house and the ages and capabilities of them. Also use the local knowledge within the control centre. For example, local machinery dealers know which landowners have access to certain machinery or equipment and which ones would be more vulnerable to the fire and require assistance.
- . Ensure water points at all irrigation outlets are accessible and very clearly marked – for example a painted sign on the bitumen road and a sign on a steel post on the fenceline near the outlet. Follow up by clearly marking these water points on the map given to each crew.
- . Red trucks & City fire personnel need to be aware that Assets protection for farmers should include not only the house and yard but sheds, machinery, livestock, pasture, fences and stockyards – these are the assets and livelihood of farms. And it is a fact that not many farmhouses are built close to bitumen roads so these vehicles need to be able to access these houses.
- . Better maps for foreign(non local) fire fighters
- . Road blocks – could get into town for supplies but not allowed back out which meant we could not access any emergency agencies. We had no power to use computer to look online so did not know what was available eg Red Cross, Emergency water supplies etc. We need "Help" to come to us if in rural areas as you cannot or should not expect "Impacted Victims" to leave their defended property to come into town and look for services or help.
- . Many farmers and neighbours came to our aid in the first few hours of the first fire, all had fire fighting units and that first night I believe many houses and farms were saved because of the local help. In future, subsidise purchases of fire fighting units in all areas.

. When a fire is this big and covers such a large area, small control centres, consisting of a vehicle equipped with flashing lights and radio communication every few kilometres may be a good idea.

I would also like the following information that is still stored on my iphone to be acknowledged:-

Below are the Text messages received from +61 444 444 444 on my mobile 0427089499. From 6<sup>th</sup>-10th January 2016 I was in the same area of Waroona and received alerts for Waroona, Lake Clifton and Harvey but not one for Yarloop which I feel should have been sent before 4:00pm on Thursday the 7th January 2016.

Wed 6 Jan 10:36pm

Bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING from DFES for Waroona. If the way is clear, leave now. More info [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), 13 33 37 or local radio

Fri 8 Jan 4:13pm

Bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING from DFES for Lake Clifton. If the way is clear, leave now in a northerly direction. More info [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), 13 33 37 or local radio

Sat 9 Jan 3:37pm

Bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING from DFES for Harvey. If the way is clear, leave now. More info [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), 13 33 37 or local radio

Following is the aforementioned email:-

START OF EMAIL

Waroona Fires - Walmsley Family

---

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Tue 1/12/16 7:04 AM

To: mark.friend@dfes.wa.gov.au (mark.friend@dfes.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mark,

Thank you for taking my call today. It is a phone call I have been wanting to make but needed to do when I was not so emotionally tired and worn out. The fact that you were stationed on the corner of Somers & Buller Roads, West Waroona on Thursday was a blessing for us. I know there were a few occasions when I jumped in my car and drove down to you and requested assistance for neighbours or ourselves.

On one occasion I had received a call that the Goomalling Fire Truck was bogged in a paddock and had been for 3 hours and could not get through to anyone for help. You immediately recalled that you had a grader in the area and sent them to the truck for assistance.

Later, I raced back down to you to inform you that my husband, [REDACTED] and two young sons were near the house, Utopia, on Alexander Road with our ute and towed fire fighting unit and needed assistance. You were by yourself and made radio contact, and advised to take a meal break. Your response was "Negative, I require units" Within minutes you had 2 or 3 light vehicles - Wanneroo Units which were low on water but happy to follow me back to our farm and refill with our high pressure irrigation system and be directed back out to where they could cross the paddock to assist my family. Your third unit was waiting on Buller Road for us and followed them out. By the time I got back to your corner you had organised some heavy units, passed on a message from my husband regarding a tractor and assured me that you would send my boys home. This was a relief as it meant my sons could patrol our western boundary for spot fires. Not once did you doubt my request or hesitate to help. The fire trucks that filled up with water at our farm before heading out talked to me and kept me calm and gave me such confidence. I believe they were Wanneroo volunteers and Perth ones but using Kalbarri units. Please let these people know how much we appreciated their actions that night. They also had the common sense when following the farm track across the paddocks to close every gate they opened to keep the stock in. My husband tells me that they fought the fire alongside him and between them saved Utopia. It was not their property or a friend's but they respected it meant a lot to someone and protected it. The next night, Utopia was under threat again, but from the south and a different crew were in charge of the area and did things a different way. Not as effective or as supportive.

Over the three or four days and nights we have battled this fire, first from the east, then threats from the west and finally from the south the fire crews, either volunteer or professional, have responded to our requests without hesitation. It may have helped us that they came from 'face to face' requests. I would also like you to pass on to DFES that on the first night (Wednesday/Thursday am) my first contact with a fire unit was at the junction of McLure and Somers Road. This was a Harvey unit who stopped for me and took my word that if they continued east on McLure Road they would find fires and farmers in need of assistance. They headed off straight away. No less than an hour later that unit had tracked the fire along what we call the main Waroona irrigation drain heading west, where we were now fighting to save our house and farm at the Somers Road bridge. They once again asked where they could help and trusted me when I sent them off down the neighbour's driveway to fight the fire. Once I had assured them they could turn around easily at the end of the driveway they drove down and helped my husband who was on the tractor trying to make a firebreak. Meanwhile, the Waroona unit turned up to assist but as we had about 4 fellow farmers and their fire fighting units battling the blaze on our farm and knowing that it was still heading west I sent them out to Coronation Road to our neighbour's to protect their house. Again, this unit, because they were local knew exactly which house I meant and how to get there and headed off with no hesitation. A little later a Fremantle unit turned up for "the house at [REDACTED] but as the house itself was no longer under threat I asked them to help contain fire in the paddock and the back of our farm, but they advised they were only for house protection and moved off.

There were other times I drove to the corner of Somers and Coronation Roads where there were many fire trucks to ask for help in fighting the fire on our north western boundary and they said they could not as they were responding to calls for assistance further west but would pass the message on, which they did.

Basically, in my little area of Coronation, Somers & Buller Roads I believe we had wonderful support but the fact that my neighbour's could still contact me, ask for help and that I could see fire units day and night in those two spots and those units were quick to respond to my requests helped us through the Waroona fire and saved many other farms and houses.

I would also like DFES to know that due the help of many farmers in the area with their equipment, many firebreaks were created and fire break outs controlled in the natural bush at the back of our farm. These men just turned up with their equipment and got to work - they did this knowing that the diesel used, wear and tear on equipment and their own time was all voluntary. DFES did have a lot of units in our area, communication was excellent in our small area due to the visibility of personnel but please consider how many farmers had units on the ground too - small fire fighting units and farm equipment but most importantly local knowledge of the area, who lives where and how to get there.

My husband, my 20 year old daughter and my 17 year old son are in the West Waroona Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade which is a small brigade of 14.

They only have one light unit between them, but were on call constantly which made it difficult as the members are made up from 5 farming families and unfortunately when they are not in the unit actively fighting the fire they are fighting the fires either on their own farms or neighbours' farms.

I feel that in cases where the fire is in the local area after the initial first day or so, break the local brigades up, send one local firefighter out with a "foreign" crew, use the local for their knowledge of the area - don't keep the locals as one brigade in these instances. By night three, when the Eastern states crews came over I found trucks at night "lost" just driving around they told me, between Waroona and Preston. Because they don't know of the backtracks, where the houses are at night because there are no power and lights, or the lay of the land they I think were just patrolling the bitumen roads and probably had no idea how to get to a flare up in the distance or across a paddock. I also think that having mini control centres every 10km on major crossroads is a good idea.

My only not so great comment is that on the Thursday night, my daughter and another volunteer were in the West Waroona light unit and had requested back up on Coronation Road, west of Dorset Road. They had been advised to use channel 43 which did not register on their radio, and when they informed the academy brigade they were ignored. Many times they called the Central Command and could not get through yet when they did they were told they were on their own. Between them they saved two houses but when they travelled east along Coronation Road to refill with water (barely 2kms) they came across 9 fire units parked up on the side road. They had been there for a little while. I am not sure why they could not drive west for 5 minutes and help out. Surely Central Command would have known of their whereabouts. If you like I can get more details of this incident from my daughter. In hindsight, she should have called me on her mobile and I could pass the request onto you and they would have had the backup they required and maybe saved the machinery and haysheds. Personally I think just the fact that backup would have arrived when they needed it and given them support so that they did not feel so alone.

Thank you again Mark for co-ordinating all you did on your shift at the corner and please pass on my grateful thanks to the volunteers and professionals you had helping us. They were amazing and brave and willing to help without hesitation.

I am sorry that this note of appreciation has turned out to be more than that.

Take care and stay safe in your job.....

Regards,

[REDACTED]

END OF EMAIL

Thank you for taking the time to read my response to your request for submissions.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]



## **SUBMISSION: Public Enquiry into January 2016 Waroona Fire**

**TO: Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry**  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WA 6005

**FROM:** [REDACTED]

Postal address  
[REDACTED]

---

I am a property owner and farmer in Cookernup. We had a fire incident on our property, resulting in losses of fencing, pasture and hay, but not buildings and other infrastructure. We chose to stay and defend.

I make the following submission, under terms of reference 1.

I am willing to attend the hearing in person.

### **1. Pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation. [1(a)]**

You will have received many submissions on the need for fuel load reduction, particularly on public property. I make specific reference to road reserves, railway reserves, public drains and waterways.

It was once common practice for farmers to conduct cool burns on frontage road reserves, for example, often with the assistance of, or undertaken by local volunteer fire brigades. This provided opportunities for training and fire management experience. This practice has now been made illegal, I believe, by Local Government regulations, for reasons of environmental protection of wildlife corridors.

I submit that this contributed to the reason why this fire was able to move quickly and freely along these corridors from the originating forest fire towards the coastal plain, and its spread on the coastal plain, making control more difficult. It was particularly evident in efforts to control the fire which approached Harvey on the Harvey River on Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> of January.

**Recommendation:** I believe the practice of controlled cool burning of road verges and reserves should be reinstated and conducted on a regular basis.

## **2. Effectiveness of incident management and coordination [1(d)]**

### **Co-ordination between DFES, on-ground fire management and local landowner volunteers**

In situations where fire is affecting or threatening farming properties the likelihood of owners staying and defending is high. They have considerable investment in assets as well as needing to protect and save livestock. They also have mobile firefighting equipment, tractors, discs, ploughs and front-end loaders. They also have informal networks where neighbours look out for each other. They will have excellent local knowledge: information which is not necessarily available to the fire control agencies. Also, in many cases it is these farmers who are on the ground before anyone else, as 'first responders'. For all these reasons, farmers will stay and defend.

Yet there is poor communication between the control agencies and these farmers. Often the assistance is rejected, possibly on safety grounds (duty of care) and the belief they only 'get in the way' of professionals or accredited firefighters.

It is suggested that, rather than dismissing or ignoring such assistance, given that the reality is, farmers will remain at the fire front for the reasons above, whether they are recognised or not, there is invaluable local knowledge and committed assistance which can be a useful resource to those on the ground.

The issue is: how can that resource be captured and managed?

**Recommendation:** Formal or informal local area networks of landowners should be developed through the local government's fire control officer, with names, contact numbers and equipment capacity. In fire situations, liaison between a nominated spokesperson for the group can work collaboratively with the fire management agency. This is especially important in big fires where controllers have little or no local knowledge.

## **3. Protection of Essential services and infrastructure.[1(e)]**

### **Incident relating to Western Power's 330Kv high voltage transmission line**

On the morning of Thursday January 7<sup>th</sup>, between about 10.00 and 11.00, a grass fire was observed at the base of tower 178 on the Western Power's 330 Kv high voltage transmission line, which crosses our neighbour's and our property. This was followed almost immediately by a series of explosions and fireballs which resulted in a major fire on our property at the above address.

The incident was controlled first by local property owners and neighbours assisting me, followed later by backup fire crews and a helicopter water bomber. It was sufficiently major for an evacuation order for Harvey to be issued within several hours.

It has been determined by Western Power that the originating fire was likely caused by an ember from the Waroona fire. No other explanation has been offered. The subsequent and related explosions have been attributed to high atmospheric carbon and a build-up of carbon on the insulators, causing a flashover, which resulted in the explosions and fire. This raises a number of questions.

As far as I am able to determine from available information, the proposition by Western Power is that a single (and only) live ember was carried more than 10 km and possibly closer to 20 km, from the major fire front which was at Waroona at that time (about 30 hours elapsed travel time for the front to reach our closest point to the fire front, about 1.5 km from our boundary). The cause is judged by Western Power not to be the transmission line.

In attempting to raise my concerns at the time of the incident, to alert Western Power to the possible threat of similar events occurring in the fire zone, it was almost impossible to contact anyone within the Western Power's high voltage transmission area. I understand an on ground inspection was carried out by Western Power, later on the day, in the company of the local fire control officer, and the incident was thought, at the time, to be caused by sparking or a flashover on the line. It took a week for the response to be acted on, which was an aerial wash down of the infrastructure. Further follow-up wash downs have been effected.

**Recommendation:** Given this incident is predicated on the belief by Western Power that it was caused by a single ember falling from a distance of about 20 km and that Harvey was ordered to evacuate as a result, it seems important that the cause of the incident should be clarified: to establish whether it is possible for an ember attack to occur over such a distance, given the weather and local conditions at the time, and whether such a response was valid, including the evacuation order for Harvey.

#### **4. Effectiveness of public messaging and communications with the community [1(f) and (g)]**

This issue is related to 1 (d) above.

Generally, the information flowing back to those farmers or property owners who stay 'on the ground' to defend is totally non-existent. Once an alert is issued by DFES and owners are told to leave immediately, there can be a considerable elapse of time, even 24 hours or more, when there is no useful information about the location of the fire front, the path of travel or any other real-time information, before the front hits. It would help owners in their preparation or in acting to defend, if more detailed knowledge about the position of the front, its direction and speed, for example, was available: also, whether other assets are likely to be available.

In our situation, after the original fire (noted above) was contained but not controlled, the situation was left entirely in our hands and the hands of local farmers to manage. That it broke a containment line during the night was unfortunate, but was again responded to by the local farmers. On both occasions, a combination of 000 calls and calls to the known local fire control-officer, was used to alert authorities. Once the breakout was contained, it was again left to farmers to mop up. Personal warnings and an update was issued on the spot by the attending crews, with general advice on the likely direction and time of attack of the major fire front, but we were then left without any sense of the likelihood of support. If there was some means by which real-time information was available, possibly in regular map updates or progress alerts, and the likely availability of support, it would speed up and strengthen local on-the-ground responses. The map information provided to the public through the DFES website is, largely, useless. There is a large gap in information between the high level alerts (with little information other than the alert level and recommended action to stay or leave) and the informal, locally sourced and distributed information, mostly through text messaging on the ground between neighbours. If it is possible for neighbours to work this way, it should be possible to have a system to provide that in real time through a website or text.

**Recommendation:** An information gap exists between high level general public information and alerts, and useful, real time information on the fire, for the benefit of those who, for various reasons, decide to stay and defend. This is particularly so for farming property owners, who have the capacity, equipment and determination to defend and protect their neighbourhood. This information gap needs to be addressed.

## BUREAUCRATIC BUNGLING BURNED MY BIRTH TOWN TO THE GROUND – RIP YARLOOP 07/01/2016



My first home Wagerup 1950



2016

Born in Yarloop hospital, I grew up in Waroona and remember vividly the first big bush fire to annihilate the small country town of Dwellingup in 1961 in Western Australia's living memory. All the town people and from the surrounding areas rallied to the cause to fight it. It was all done by volunteers and available local private equipment. That is what Australians are famous for. Not bureaucratic over protectiveness.

Many more intense bush fires are becoming prevalent. Our illustrious political leaders keep on repeating the same line after each devastating event. *"We learn how to do it better after each fire"*.

How many more lessons do they need? Reviews after reviews, lives lost, livelihoods and homes destroyed before it becomes blatantly obvious?

The ideology of government control, over departmentalized, excessive bureaucratic political correctness devoid of any semblance of pure common sense will never win against the fury that mother nature is capable of unleashing.

We have yet to experience further natural or man-made calamities that the other states have experienced in recent times, such as floods.

Dread to think how that will be handled here.

With absolutely nothing but admiration for the people on the ground (and sky), risking their lives at the fire front and in the background coordinating the fight with all their available resources. I cannot help but wonder, do these wonderful officers have the latest and best technology available at their disposal? Have they been well coordinated ?

What, if any measures have been devoted to **prevention** in the first place?

Second, what monitoring methods are being employed for the very earliest **detection** of any bush fire?

Thirdly, what standby capability level of man power and equipment is there in place to **respond** quickly and effectively? Deployment to the source of ignition before it spreads would be a big plus in the fight.

Our political representatives are naïve in their constant narcissistic believe that by putting in place a government "Authority" or two, charged with absolute power and responsibility, that's all that is required to solve the problem – irrespective if they get it right or wrong. Invariably there are too many instances of getting it wrong. Unfortunately, having such "authorities" then excludes everyone else from input, advice, power or jurisdiction. Least of all are the local individuals on the ground who actual know best and whose lives are directly affected.

We never seem to learn from our own history that over-zealous governance does not work. Our community is steered into becoming more and more dependent on the state and our people are no longer responsible for their own actions any more.

Governments only needs to put in place the very best means of Prevention, Detection, effective first Alert system and a well-equipped and highly mobile Responsive group. A group that can coordinate & be assisted by every able bodied local volunteer, augmented with private and available local equipment. Not shut out all and sundry under misguided departmental policies and property owners cannot even cross road blocks to get back to their own places to maybe prevent the majority of destruction caused by post fire embers.

The speed and ferocity of many prevalent fires is now also becoming very obvious and that's where pre preparation for the more vulnerable and extreme danger areas need to be identified and pre-emptive measures put in place now.

Consulting with the ordinary local citizen and giving them credit for normal common sense and control over his or her personal decision making ability would go a long way. It worked a lot better in the dim distant past.



4<sup>th</sup> March 2016

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Ph: [REDACTED]

RE: Ferguson Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the Waroona and Districts Fires.

Firstly, our property was impacted in the event and we were fortunate to have not lost buildings and sheds but we did suffer loss to our farm in fencing, pasture and remnants of natural bush.

Sadly, this was a traumatic event for my family as we firmly believe early intervention of a fire some 25km east from us may have saved our community copious quantities of grief, loss and trauma. Many stories of indifference by Professional Firemen, Police, DPAW and DEFS Personnel resonate still now nearly 2 months after the event, but I don't want to reiterate the already numerous archived incidents you will already have. I would like to focus on what I feel may be some suitable strategies from my personal perspective and experience.

I have had past experience in Local Government as I served my community as a Councillor for 10 years and was entrusted to be the Shire President for some of those. I was heavily involved in the processes and machinations of the former FESA Department now DFES in an incident involving the destruction of 10 homes and infrastructure in 2011 at Lake Clifton. I was privy to an inside seat as to the management and process that can be followed during an incident such as this and I still have recollections of how things were handled well and some not so well. It was such a small incident in comparison to this one but still very important to those impacted and those involved in it. Communities show resilience and strength, but like most traumatic events the passage of time heals and helps rebuild.

When we decided on Wednesday evening (6<sup>th</sup> January) to stay and defend, we actioned our Bushfire Plan and worked tremendously hard to divert an oncoming fire

from destroying our house and sheds. Good fortune and good friends and family helped us achieve this. Professional help came in the way of a Fremantle truck. As with many anecdotes you have found in your inquiry asset protection was a priority and open fires burning in the immediate area were not. I question the definition of an asset. We regard our fencing, our pasture and our fertility assets as we have spent many years developing all of these and now we have much work to do rebuilding these. My initial thoughts on this was, that active fire in any situation of an intensive agricultural precinct like ours should be engaged. Merely waiting to defend a house on a road as a fire approaches is tantamount to negligence as sacrificing what you may perceive as dry grass or a paddock only increases fire volumes and areas. We can only guess how large this fire may have been if not for timely firefighting in areas that may not have seemed significant but active, may have enlarged down ward of its then position. I was well aware of the abhorrent conditions that night. The testimony to the good people who engaged with the fire that night, is that no one got injured or hurt and all worked safely, well aware of its potential.

I believe that the fire should have been engaged at all possible chances and not left to enlarge. Not all fires are the same and conditions always vary and I understand that some management processes are different for differing emergencies, but trying to manage this event instead of swift positive on ground assault on the fire, I believe, may have had a better outcome. The value of the agricultural industry cannot be understated in these large events. They have provided invaluable resources to assist in mitigation and should perhaps be recognised more by way of developing an emergency reserve that could be registered and activated if a significant event were to occur again. The cumbersome and bureaucratic management of this emergency has led to the dilution of sensible and decisive decision making as good capable fire fighters are now looking and trained to always seek higher guidance when they may be very aware of the choice to make, but have been systematically disempowered to make the decisions. The system has become too slow and has lost pace with the speed needed to successfully engage a fire. I understand that safety is paramount and our fire fighters must take all precautions to do their job but fire fighting has inherent risk and we can never make a fire ground completely safe.

The ridiculous and cumbersome permit system for access was another action during the event which needs to be addressed. We had a large involvement post fire in delivering fodder to stock temporarily contained in small holding areas and we had some very traumatic altercations with non-sensible police that seemed very rigid and

arrogant in their handling of what we were doing. A development of a plan to handle a rural area significantly different from a city area should be examined.

I hope that all the information you will sift through in the coming months and peoples' ideas do get incorporated into a sensible map of the future of emergency management and that they do get implemented.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Mr. Euan Ferguson  
Waroona Bushfire Inquiry  
SEMC  
West Leederville, WA

Dear Sir

**Submission to the Inquiry into the Yarloop/Waroona Bushfire**

This submission is made on behalf of the personnel listed below . We are every day indivial people who own property in rural areas of Western Australia. Collectively we believe the current management and control of forests and forest fires must go hand in hand.

The current management agents clearly lack the skills to prevent fire disasters such as we have seen in the last 5years .

The **loss of life, property** and **natural resources** (timber ) not to mention the **loss of income from property owners , businesses** etc, is in our opinion **totally unacceptable**.

Whilst we appreciate forest fires, in certain circumstances eg extreme weather conditions , do pose difficulty at suppression, the current management of forests inclusive of preventive measures and suppression does nothing to minimise the risk.

Whilst our response is made under the umbrella of the Yarloop /Waroona fire the fires at Esperance , Northcliffe and Boddington were subject to a number of similar issues faced at the Yarloop/ Waroona fire.

We do not believe there is a need for individual presentation of our submission however should you wish to clarify any issue raised please feel free to contact any of the below named.

Kind regards

[Redacted] ( on behalf of the below Individuals)  
4 /3 /2016

[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
Phone : [Redacted]

**Terms of Reference Waroona Fire response :**

**ToR 1 a; RECOMMENDATION (1) To enhance bushfire prevention WA needs to adopt a significant increase in prescribed burning program .**

**ToR 1 a; RECOMMENDATION (2 )Landowners (who live adjacent to crown land which the government is not managing) should be allowed to undertake fuel reduction operations.**

**Legislation will need to be amended to allow this to happen, prevent prosecution and burn management procedures /Guidelines lines developed and provided for landowners to follow.**

**ToR 1 a; RECOMMENDATION (3) Areas classified as Wilderness and National Parks or land vested in the crown shall under no circumstances be excluded from the State Prescribed Burning Program .**

**ToR 1 a; RECOMMENDATION (4)Where Government resources are restricted communities within WA which have volunteer bush fire groups shall be utilised to undertake the prescribed burning program for areas on and around private properties and applicable town sites .**

**ToR 1 b; RECOMMENDATION Review required of Emergency Management Plans within bushfire risk areas .**

**ToR 1c; RECOMMENDATION (1 )A cost benefit analysis of this method of suppression inclusive of losses from the fire against a prescribed burning program must be undertaken to determine the benefit of implementing a full aerial strategy verses an effective Prescribed Burning Program.**

**ToR 1 c; RECOMMENDATION (2) A fire suppression strategy is required to ensure the fire is actively pursued and managed by staff with forest management as well as forest fire suppression expertise. This will require an independent body managed by staff with the applicable forest expertise and access to resources as needed. Legislative changes will need to be implemented and altered as is necessary.**

**ToR 1 e; RECOMMENDATION ( 1)To prevent service failure (loss of water flow) as seen at the Yarloop town site a back- up system shall be commissioned .**

**To achieve this, a comprehensive Risk Assessment should be undertaken, by the appropriate authority ie. (Water Corp), of all towns and surrounding areas subject to catastrophic failure of the power requirements to deliver an adequate water supply.**

**ToR 1 f; RECOMMENDATION (1) Access to all applicable and appropriate (local coverage) radio and television stations to broad cast warnings and public messaging must be maintained.**

**ToR 1 g(i) ;RECOMMENDATION (1)Greater education of all residents is required within this area**

**ToR 1 g (iv)RECOMMENDATION (1) as legislation of this nature is already in place inclusion of similar legislation during fire emergencies shall be drafted and implemented to protect staff and Departments.**

**ToR 1 g (iv)RECOMMENDATION (2) the process for resident's timely return to their properties shall be implemented as a component of the Local Emergency Management Plan.**

**ToR 1 h; RECOMMENDATION (1) The Local Emergency Management Plan shall include a strategy (accommodation, care, control and vet service needs) for livestock unable to be evacuated. To prevent unnecessary suffering of livestock a strategy for timely destruction and**

disposal of livestock, veterinarian assistance etc. is to be included within this plan.

ToR 1 h; RECOMMENDATION (2) Property owners whose livestock is managed under intense farming practices (piggery's, egg farms, dairy farms and feed lots etc. ) need to be referenced within ToR 1g(iv) (2)above.

### **APPENDIX 1: Supporting Comments to ToR: 1**

(a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities;  
Current practices of fire prevention within WA are deemed by the undersigned to be inadequate. Current records clearly indicate a significant decline in the hectares of controlled burning undertaken by applicable department.  
Effective fire control is enhanced by areas of forest that have low fuel loading.

### **INCREASED AIRIAL PRESCRIBED BURNING OR BURN**

Written by [REDACTED] 1/2/2016

Following the disastrous 1961 Dwellingup fire, prescribed burning to reduce fuel loads and establish a broader mosaic of burnt forest blocks was adopted as a priority activity by the Forest Department.

Spring offered the best opportunity to do this. Slowly drying fuels, open country first, followed by heavier, canopy covered fuels as time progressed towards the closed summer period.

Autumn burning generally can't commence until rains have re-established a level of moisture, this offering some control of fire run, resulting in a considerably shorter burning season. The wet heavier fuels often remaining unburnt. My experience in the southern forests, Shannon River –Walpole districts saw dirt roads built establishing what was referred to as half milers. These half milers created forest blocks paralleling existing roads to form strips of country approximately half a mile wide. With extreme density of shrub and fuel loading, these strips required walking lanes to provide safe access for gang members to cross the blocks and ignite spot fires. These spot fires form the lighting grid pattern following initial edge burning. The lanes usually 100 metres apart were previously installed by a light bulldozer with the blade held above ground level, so as to flatten the shrub but not totally clear the path for walkers. The gang of lighters, one per lane, would progress in an echelon formation across the burn area. Progressing back and forth, upwind for safety from developing previously lit spot fires. Lighters needed to maintain an even steady pace through each lane to stay ahead of their

following lighter on the up wind next lane. A compass was deployed to ensure the lanes were installed with accuracy. With large tracts of heavily forested fuel , and the resources then available , not enough area could be seasonally burnt to achieve the protection aimed for. Some fire events still proved to be a major issue.

About this time, the mid to late 1960 , aircraft prescribed burning was first being investigated and developed, with trials beginning in spring 1965. The first ever burn in Pingrup block between Shannon River and Walpole as described by Roger Underwood in his recently published book "FIRE FROM THE SKY". Once refined and established as a regular practice much greater areas of reduced fuel ages were achieved. The value of this was reflected over many years since the mid 1960s.

Now, for what ever reason, area burnt in the forest country has greatly reduced. From what ever the ignition source may be , wild fire today can build at alarming rates, and quite frequently it does in heavy without the patchwork of one, two and three year old burns etc in front of its wind driven path (note summer 2015-2016).

Emphasis must return to broad scale fuel reduction burning. As areas are burnt and rotations are once again achieved, wild fire runs will be checked. With diligent planning, current year burns can be backed onto previously burnt areas of light fuel. Any wild fire running into a one year old burn will not be sustained. There is very little leaf fall at this stage. There is no suppression activity required, resources can be deployed elsewhere. One year old ground is safe ground two to three relatively so. In comparison, rural areas where there are the added annual cured grasses which encroach into nearby bushland provide an annual threat of fast moving, flashy fire activity. Town sites need perimeter burn protection to reduce fuel loads between forests and built up areas and remnant patches of bush such as road verges and vacant lots must also be kept at a minimum fuel age. This practice could not be achieved without considerable cost and inconvenience. But the alternative has clearly been witnessed, with life, property, stock loss and lively hood all majorly affected

I commenced work with the forest department in Walpole in 1963. There were no water bombers, heavy machinery, water retardants or fire resistant clothing. Burning trees that threatened the security of boundaries were regularly felled by torch light at night. Chainsaws were very cumbersome pieces of equipment. At times we spent hours patrolling back burns on foot with pack sprays dragging on our shoulders.

Appointed an overseer in 1969, a position I held through to retirement in 2003. I experienced the aircraft burning program through a number of rotations. Plus, numerous hand burns, there were escapes, lightning strikes etc, but never in my 40 years an event such as Dwellingup in 1961 or Yarloop in 2016. A map on page 28 of the Sunday times printed on January 31st shows the extent of the country carrying fuel loads of seven years or more. This clearly shows the situation we are facing in rural Australia and the "REAL" possibility of a disaster such as Yarloop occurring in the near future. No one can prevent lightning strikes, suspicious ignitions will still occur. But by returning to the level of the prescribed burning practices of the past MUCH GREATER PROTECTION AND FIRE CONTROL "WILL "BE ACHIEVED .



**(b) The effectiveness of emergency management plans and procedures; Having written numerous emergency management plans within industry there is a significant need for the community to be actively involved in the development and everyone needs to be fully aware of the plan's content. (Interestingly both my(Van Hazendonk ) sisters who were in contact with me during the O'Sullivan fire kept asking what they should do . Obviously neither had any idea of the Emergency Management Plan or the evacuation procedures for their area ). Serious effort is needed to improve within this area. The 2 deaths in Yarloop, indicate not all Yarloop residents were aware of the plans.**

**(c) The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire; The current use of Aerial support to deliver water and fire retardant needs to be accurately assessed to determine the overall effectiveness, inclusive of cost, as an effective suppression strategy. We the undersigned believe there is a place for limited aerial support provided it is utilised within areas where maximum suppression or protection benefit can be obtained. Clearly in heavy wooded area, high winds and darkness this method of suppression has serious limitations and can be classified as non-effective.**

**The science of fire is not complicated it requires 3 elements to continue combustion HEAT, FUEL, OXYGEN. Equally fire suppression is not complicated, remove one or more of these elements and the fire is suppressed. A Prescribed Burning Fuel Reduction Program across this state will assist by removing/reducing the fuel element, there by either extinguishing the fire or severely restricting the fire intensity making suppression less hazardous and more likely to be effective, thereby saving lives, restricting property and livestock loss as well as not destroying our natural forest resources .**

**The benefit of low fuel loading is evident in the O'Sullivan Hotham report refer figure 9 page 18 where the O'Sullivan fire struck the Babbington fire and was stopped in its tracks.**

**(d) The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance;**

**DFES are not the body to manage forest fires. They are great at city building fires and chemical spills and getting people out of car incidents etc but not managing forest fires. Forest fires require experienced staff with forest knowledge and forest fire suppression practices. Foresters are the personnel who have complete understanding of the forest and how fire will react within the forest.**

**(e) Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency services organisations and the community; The town of Yarloop clearly suffered due to essential service failure in particular water provision .**

**(f) The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors;**

**There are areas where the effectiveness of messaging and warnings can be restricted. Mobile telephone reception has areas within this state where there is limited and in some areas zero reception.**

**The reliance on land line telephone communication can be severely disrupted due to line failure.**

**Although unthinkable some residents do not have a mobile phone service and should the land**

line be disrupted alternate sources of media messaging is required .Improved mobile telephone reception would assist.

**(g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire:**

**(i) Evacuation procedures**

In an emergency fire situation an evacuation process requires military precision. The people being evacuated must be fully aware of the risks they may experience and what is required to mitigate those risks. Evacuation in a non-emergency situation exposes the person or persons evacuating to far less risk. Industry is required to conduct constant exercises and yet when a major incident such as the Waroona fire people are expected to know exactly what,where and how to evacuate. Without training this is a recipe for disaster

Clearly some of the general public are either unaware of when they should leave and/or of the hazards they may face together with the actions that should be adopted when confronted with these hazards.

**(iv)Management of people seeking to return to their properties, and**

There is a level of discord amongst people seeking to return to their properties. Clearly there is concern about litigation should people who have been authorised, by staff in authority, to re-enter a fire zone incurring injury/damage as a result of the fire (log across road, bridge collapse etc.)

Entry restrictions in some instances are considered excessive by the general public.

There is legislation currently within the OSH Act where Elected Health and Safety Representatives incur not civil liability for their actions or failure of actions in undertaking their duties of an Elected Health and Safety Representative. SECTION 33 (3)of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 states : A safety and health representative incurs no civil liability arising from his or her performance of, or his or her failure to perform, any function of a safety and health representative under this Act.

Submission from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Home Tel: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

**This is NOT a confidential submission and we are willing to discuss these matters in at a hearing.**

## **1. The response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire**

### **(e) Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency services organisations and the community;**

We are concerned about the maintenance of major power lines belonging to Western Power that are located on forestry and farming land, such as that which we lease, and the potential for these power lines to cause bushfires. Upon reflection we consider that the ash build up resulting from the Waroona Bushfires combined with the moisture that was present on the morning of Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January and the warm temperatures that day and over the two preceding days and the strong easterly winds with the already sparking insulators on the steel pylon power poles caused the grass fire that resulted in the fire in the southern part of Cookernup at about 11 am that day.

Please refer to the Appendix 1: a letter that I submitted to an inspector from the Office of Energy Safety who meet with our immediate western neighbour, [REDACTED] on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2016. I have amended some of the details in this letter as per the bolded text in the letter so that it is a more correct record of the events that took place that day pertaining to the above fire.

As a result of this fire, we had approximately 200 metres of fence lines partially burnt which enabled our livestock (about 100 sheep) to wander into our neighbours' properties. We also had about 2 hectares of pasture burnt and a section of about 1 hectare of remnant vegetation (notably paperbarks) which were severely affected. [REDACTED] has repaired the fence lines at our own expense. Our western neighbours, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have both lost pasture and fencing. [REDACTED] also had about 100 large round bales of meadow hay burnt. Our house and sheds were not affected by the fire or smoke. Therefore we have not made a claim for financial assistance through Centerlink. We did lose all our refrigerated and frozen food due to the power outage from Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> until Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January, which we will make a claim to Western Power using the Extended Power Outage Scheme form. [REDACTED] has approached the Shire of Harvey to see if he can make a claim for fencing materials used to repair the above fences.

Subsequent to this letter and the above meeting there were at least two more flyovers by a helicopter over the powerlines – one to again clean the insulators several times and one that appeared to photograph the insulators in mid to late January this year.

██████ has contacted Western Power via telephone several times in mid and late January and early February since this fire to discuss this matter and to raise the above concerns and to make inquiries regarding compensation. The various Western Power representatives he spoke to acknowledged his concerns but did not provide him with advice or support and did not concede any responsibility or culpability in regards to the above fire. ██████ was advised to complete a Customer Damage Report which he had posted to him. He completed the form and posted it back on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

██████████████████, our immediate western neighbour, has written a number of letters to Western Power and relevant parliamentarians concerning the above matter. In response to his correspondence he was visited by an inspector from the Office of Energy Safety, as referred to above. He has also received some correspondence from Western Power in response to his letters. ██████████ had also completed his Customer Damage Report earlier than us and has been informed recently that his claim was rejected.

There were media reports in the West Australian newspaper dated Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January, that this fire was caused by an ember attack or was a spot fire from the main Waroona fire. This seems implausible due to the distance of about 10 kilometres that these embers would have had to travel and the fact that there were no other spot fires or ember attacks close by. Also this was approximately 7 hours before the main fire front ravaged the Yarloop townsite, approximately 7 kilometres away.

(g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire:

- (i) Evacuation procedures
- (ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire
- (iii) **Provision of welfare support**

When ██████ and I returned to our rented property on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January we cleaned up our property as needed and ██████ began repairing the fence lines, as referred to above. From Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January until Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January, I began to work as a volunteer at the Cookernup Hall, assisting members of the Cookernup Progress Association, under the guidance of the President Mr Kerry Argent, with their fire relief efforts. I was able to do this because I was on holidays from my full- time teaching position. This encompassed preparing meals for volunteer firefighters and other volunteers, sorting out donated food, clothing, household and livestock supplies, providing supplies for people affected by the fires and cleaning the Cookernup Hall buildings including the kitchen, hall, verandahs and toilets as well as assisting the firefighters to clean their premises. I was one of two volunteers who also drove out to fire affected farms in the Yarloop, Hamel, Cookernup and Uduc areas to deliver food and water supplies and provide social welfare.

Whilst the volunteer and career fire fighters and the volunteers working at the Cookernup Hall did the best they could, I am concerned about the coordination of the relief effort and the maintenance of that effort in terms of volunteer fatigue and the need for people such as myself to return to work when our holidays were over. To my knowledge there were two visits to the Cookernup Hall by the Harvey Shire President, Mrs Tania Jackson, one visit by the Shire of Harvey CEO Mr Michael Parker and one visit by another Harvey Shire councillor whose name I do not know. I understand that Mr Murray Cowper, MLA for Murray - Wellington and Mrs Nola Marino, MP for Forrest also visited the Cookernup Hall in the two weeks after the Waroona Fire started. However, while these visits provided support there was no on-going leadership in terms of the above issues of maintaining these services and relieving the volunteers.

In the first few days after the fire there was a definite need for mental health and welfare, financial and insurance support as well as physical support eg fresh water, food, clothing,

feed for pets and livestock and housing for people affected by the fires at the Cookernup Hall. Most of the physical needs were able to be dealt with at least in the short term by the volunteers. However, in regards to social support, while most of the volunteers were willing to listen to people affected by the fires, they did not have the expertise or resources to properly support these people. As a result Mr Argent made a series of telephone calls in order to get Centrelink to spend 2 x 2 days in Harvey and Cookernup meeting with up to 50 individuals, couples and families each day in the three weeks after the fire. With other contacts made by Cookernup Hall volunteers to seek support under the guidance of Mr Argent, the Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and a number of private counsellors arrived at the Cookernup Hall and provided some of these services. For example the Australian Red Cross willing provided 2- 3 staff for about four days in the fortnight after the fire. This was extremely helpful not only in the provision of counsellors but also in terms of their staff organising people to systematically receive advice and support in regards to finances, applications for funding and further counselling from the Salvation Army and private counsellors.

## APPENDIX 1

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Office of Energy Safety

Level 1

Mason Bird Building

303 Sevenoaks Street

CANNINGTON WA

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing to give my first-hand account of the fire that started about **11.00am** on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016 on our rented property at 125 Thompson Road, Cookernup, Western Australia.

My son, [REDACTED], and I were at home. My husband, [REDACTED] was away from home on our farm in Dumbleyung. We were aware of the Waroona fire and we were checking the Department of Fire and Emergency Service (DFES) website regularly. We had also been out and checked our property early that morning. The temperature was warm – about 30<sup>o</sup>C and the wind was from the east and blowing quite strongly.

As part of our watch over our property, I looked out from our lounge room windows which have a reasonable view of the powerlines **to the south** of the house and the steel pylon numbered as follows:

**SHO-ST-91**

**178**

**9SD2LM/30**

**PILED FOUND.**

I noticed a grass fire starting underneath the power lines about 100 metres to the east of this pylon. Within two minutes the fire had spread to the pylon and there was an explosion and a fire ball formed around the steel structure of the pylon. I was later told that this was because an **insulator**

(which I had mistakenly referred to as a transmitter previously) had blown up. The fire continued to travel west burning through part of the paperbark tree gully on our property and into [REDACTED] property.

There was a second explosion as the **insulators** blew up on the pylon in their property. Once again I could see the fire ball from the second explosion from our property. In the meantime my son dialled 000 and I rang [REDACTED] a near farming neighbour who had a fire fighting unit. I also rang Western Power as I was concerned that the overhead power lines would be adversely affected and/or spread the fire further.

In the meantime, my son and I collected up our pets and essential items and left the property in our car. I attempted to call th [REDACTED] an [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who are our neighbours to the east of us. After we left our property I drove to Epiros to check that they were aware of the situation as I had only been able to get one of their young daughters on the telephone when I rang and I was concerned for their safety. They were all at home and [REDACTED] was in the process of evacuating [REDACTED] and her children.

After I had left our property, I noticed a number of other vehicles stopped on Thompson and Salisbury Roads as the drivers were unsure whether to proceed down Thompson Road because they could see the fire from both these roads. In the meantime the aerial water bombers arrived and dropped water between the powerlines and the fire and Weekes Brook, the creek line that runs behind all of our houses in Thompson Road. The fire continued burning to the west and went into [REDACTED] property. I understand the local volunteer fire fighters were able to stop it next to the railway line on Warrawarrup Road.

My other concern regarding this fire was that it created a number of hot spots and flare ups over the next few nights that the local volunteer firefighters and farmers with fire-fighting units had to monitor and put out for several hours each night when the east winds were blowing.

On Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January I was partially awoken by the sound of the insulators on the above pylon arcing and sparking quite noticeably. This continued for a number of hours and could have been a potential fire hazard. On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January a helicopter sprayed the powerlines and insulators of the pylons with 2 – 3 flyovers each day. I have not noticed or heard the insulators arcing or sparking since then.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**WAROONA WILDFIRE INQUIRY- EFFECTS OF SILVICULTURE ON FIRE BEHAVIOUR – Submitted  
March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Dear Commissioner Ferguson

At yesterday's meeting with members of the Institute of Foresters you raised the subject of a drying climate and the potential impacts on the forests. To clarify the points I hereby submit the following information.

I have been involved in ecological studies on the Gnangara Mound and the Jarrah forest since 1976. These studies have varied from local and regional flora and vegetation studies to a range of vegetation monitoring studies.

The studies on the Gnangara Mound have reflected an expansion of communities that tolerate drier site conditions with a resulting decline in the wetland communities. This work was initially supported by the Forests Department during my employment as a researcher in that organization and more recently as a consultant to a range of government water agencies (most recently the Department of Water in 2014). Since the 1960's the ground water table has declined on the Swan Coastal Plain. Evidence for these latter declines is clearly evident in the groundwater data held and managed by the Department of Water. As mentioned during the meeting our results have recorded changes such as a shift from seasonal wetlands dominated by sedges with occasional Paperbarks and Flooded Gums to Banksia woodlands of *Banksia prionotes*, *Banksia attenuata*, *Banksia menziesii* and *Banksia ilicifolia* which tend to dominate the drier sand dune systems on the northern Swan Coastal Plain. The latest monitoring report was undertaken for the Department of Water (Mattiske Consulting Pty Ltd 2015).

As summarized yesterday, there has been a decline in the condition of localized forest stands in the northern Jarrah forest. If the drying climate continues then it is predictable that there will be a shift to a more open and lower stand of forest trees in the central and western sections of the Jarrah forest. As indicated in the extracted vegetation complex maps prepared for the Regional Forest Agreement by Mattiske and Havel (1998 – see attached maps for Pinjarra and Collie areas), the vegetation values reflect the decline in rainfall conditions from west to east with a transition from an open forest in the western forested areas to an open woodland in the eastern forested areas. The recent observed decline in localised forest stands in the northern Jarrah forest (that is not associated with the dieback disease *Phytophthora*) appears to have been associated with a variety of local site conditions that have limited soil moisture availability. Based on the patterns of vegetation in the Jarrah forest it is predictable that a similar shift to those observed on the Gnangara Mound may occur in the forest areas with a resulting change in forest structure and floristics. Initially this shift may only be evident in localized patches of decline and in reductions in the spatial extent of communities associated with seasonally moister soil conditions and creek lines; but in time it is predictable that these shifts may become more widespread. Essentially these points relate to the holding or supporting capacity of the site conditions in the respective forest areas.

Yours sincerely  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## WAROONA FIRES JANUARY 2016

NOTES FROM [REDACTED] 5<sup>TH</sup> – 12<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY

I was driving my Road Train from my Yealering farm to Waroona on Tuesday afternoon the 5<sup>th</sup> of January. As I headed in a Westerly direction from Dwellingup, there were thunderstorms and lots of lightning in the general area. I was sure that I could see smoke in Nanga/Murray River area.

On Wednesday morning around 5am while preparing to deliver my truck load of lupins, I noticed smoke up in that general area. Then whilst unloading the lupins later on that morning we watched the smoke increase. I kept an eye on the smoke whilst doing my other work during the day. I regularly checked the DFES website for updates on the fire, but there was no emergency warnings throughout the day.

Later on that night, I received a call from [REDACTED] about 9.30 – 10.00 o'clock to say that another fire had jumped the South West Highway and it was travelling fast in a Westerly direction and coming our way. We live West of Waroona on Peel Road West.

I was told that this fire had started from lightning and burnt through land surrounding the Waroona Weir, burning and killing 126 of Richard Pollocks cattle on a farm he leases east of the Weir.

I then received a call from [REDACTED] who was fighting the fire at the old milk factory on McClarty street on the southern edge of town. This property is owned by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] runs his Engineering business from there. He rang to warn us that the fire was heading in our direction. He also said that Coates Hire had been burnt down.

At that time, [REDACTED] turned up at my house and we began to get machinery and a 4wd fire ute ready.

We drove over to Somers Road to get a better look at where the fire was. We could see it was heading west very quickly along Buller Road and Somers Road and heading towards Coronation Road. At that point I could see the fire in the hills east of Waroona was pretty big and heading for town.

Local fire crews and contractors and farmers were working under treacherous conditions to try and control the fires.

Due to the hot strong winds, spot fires and embers were starting ahead and either side of the main fire.

By early morning on Thursday, several DFES fire crews were now in attendance, but they were not doing anything. The DFES crews were either driving up and down the roads or parked up watching. DFES crews would not get out of their trucks and utes to suppress the fire. DFES crews would not help the local guys on machines and work in conjunction with them.

██████████, who was fighting the fire in the Buller Road Somers Road area told me that on the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> January, he was on a loader and local farmers were working extremely hard to control and contain fire. They asked the DFES crews to help them and that if they did, they would have the fire beat before it went any further. The DFES crews refused to get out and help and said that their orders were to defend property only. Not to put out paddock fires.

By this time, I was fighting the fire on the loader, ██████████ was on a grader, ██████████ was on another loader and ██████████ had a 4wd ute with a fire unit on the back. We were desperately trying to suppress the fire and stop it from jumping Coronation Road and heading north.

On several occasions I asked the DFES crews to come and help put out the fire and work in conjunction with us, however, they gave the same responses as they had with ██████████ the previous night. They said their orders were to defend property and infrastructure only, not to put out fires in paddocks or bush.

DFES fire crews and police units throughout the course of the fire west of Waroona, just continued to drive past or park and watch the local farmers and contractors work desperately to suppress the fire. We did what we could to save infrastructure/houses along Coronation Road.

There were two large water tankers parked on the side of the road near the bridge/s-bend area on Coronation Road. They were there to fill up fire units when they were empty. I noticed that not many DFES fire units were going to refill, so when I had a chance on the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> I went and asked the tanker drivers how many DFES units they had refilled. They said "1".

Unbelievable!!! They couldn't believe that the DFES fire crews were not using their water and helping to put the fire out.

On the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2016 our son [REDACTED] drove down from Wickepin with a lowloader. It had another of our loaders on it plus a dual cab 4wd fire unit. He also had two other crew from Wickepin with him.

Thank goodness they came. If it wasn't for their assistance we would have battled to contain things. It also allowed myself, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to have a little breather for a couple of hours.

Still at this point there was no assistance from the DFES fire crews.

The fire moved in a westerly direction swiftly. The [REDACTED] family did what they could to contain the fire and protect their property. They did a good job alongside my crew. We managed to push the fire in a southerly direction at least a kilometre off Coronation Road. We managed to contain the fire to that point. We maintained the northern edge of the fire from the bridge/s-bend area on Coronation Road to the south western boundary between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. That was all we could manage.

For the next two days, we did what we could to suppress the fire and were continuously putting out spot fires as weather conditions had not improved any. We could not leave the fire.

Myself and my crew worked around the clock until the 12<sup>th</sup> January to maintain a containment our containment line. We put out many spot fires and burning trees along Coronation Road and in paddocks in a south westerly direction up to [REDACTED] boundary.

On the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> our crew came home to my place for dinner. We had had a thunder storm with approx. 4-5mm of rain falling. This gave our guys a little bit of relief.

Just before we got home to my place, my son [REDACTED] and daughter [REDACTED] ad arrived from Perth with supplies that my wife couldn't get in Waroona. They noticed that lightning had struck a tree in [REDACTED] paddock and that the top of the tree was on fire. The DFES fire crews arrived at that time but just said they were keeping an eye on it.

Before we had a chance to have our dinner, approx. 8pm my neighbour [REDACTED] rang me to say that the tree in Fred's paddock was burning pretty well and that nobody was putting it out. So my son [REDACTED] and his crew from Wickepin, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] drove over to the burning tree. The fire crew were there and said that they couldn't take their fire truck into the paddock off the road. [REDACTED] was there also and so was [REDACTED]

■■■ had put a firebreak around the burning tree. They cut the tree down and put the fire out.

On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> our crew drove back over to patrol Coronation Road between Somers Road and Coles Road. We mopped up a few small spot fires and patrolled the area from all sides. The fire on our patch seemed to be contained on this northern front and heading south to Buller Road. We went for a drive along Buller Road heading west and where it meets Coronation Road on ■■■ old farm, there was a farmer stacking paperbark branches onto a stump and trying to burn them. So we told him to spread the branches out on the burnt ground so that we could hose them down. I couldn't believe what I was seeing!

We spent the next few days putting a firebreak right through from Coronation Road jumpover to the Harvey River and patrolling the area between Coles Road and Somers Road constantly putting out flareups and burning trees.

28/01/2016

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this account of events of the bush fire that has been referred to as the Waroona fire, in the view that improvements can be made to save lives and property in the future.

I was camping with a group of friends at the new camping ground on the south side of Logue Brook dam or Lake Brockman from Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2016 to the morning of Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2016. On Tuesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 our group of friends were at the waters edge on the southern side of the dam and the time would have been approximately 5.30pm when a friend and I commented on the storms that were forming to the east. At which time we witnessed a lightning strike some considerable distance away and within half an hour I saw smoke rising from the same area.

My immediate thoughts were that I hoped that someone in authority would see the smoke and act on it, my next thought was that I wouldn't have to worry about it because the powers to be would be "on to it" besides that, I was on holidays after a busy grain harvest period, through which time I had attended 5 different fires caused by lightning strikes and other sources.

By Wednesday morning the intensity of the fire had obviously increased but I felt at the time it was under control. A group of my friends and I had decided to go four wheel driving in the hills at the back of Harvey for a couple of hours and it was during this time it became evident that the fire was very much out of control. As our concern was heightened we decided to go back to Logue Brook and access the situation, when we arrived back at our camp at about 2.30pm we found that the camping area was covered in ash from the fire which I considered at the time to be still a safe distance away.

Over the next few hours I monitored the DFES web site and as there was no watch and act alert issued I felt it was still safe to be in the area. During the night I woke at 12.30am, looked at the DFES web site and moved out of my tent to observe the glow in the sky to the north east. At 3.30am I did the same thing but observed a much bigger glow which in the night sky appeared to be from the north east to the north west. At 5.00am on Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, I got out of my tent to see that there was a lot of smoke covering most of the northern sky, at which point another member of our group had risen and our discussion centered around leaving the area. At approximately 6.00am we saw that the DFES web site had issued a watch and act for the Logue Brook area and it was at that point we alerted the rest of our group of friends that we thought it was time to pack our equipment and leave. We left by driving to the South West Highway then south to Harvey.

I would like to make the following points,

At no time did any of our group get any emergency text message.

At no time were we alerted by any staff member of the Department of Parks and Wild Life or DFES.

Our traveling group consisted of 7 vehicles, we traveled down the South West Highway then to Collie along the Coalfields Rd then across to Williams via the Williams Collie Rd and Pinjarra Williams Rd, where our group parted. As you could imagine the traffic was very heavy during that part of the journey. I then drove to my property which is in the south west part of the Corrigin Shire via Narrogin, Wickepin, Yealering and Bullaring and at no time did I see any Police officer or Police vehicle along the rout from Logue Brook dam to [REDACTED] Wickepin/Corrigin Rd.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]

WAROONA FIRES 8<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2016.

NOTES BY [REDACTED]

TRIP TO WAROONA TO GET FUEL FOR GENERATORS AND FOOD SUPPLIES.

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] drove into Waroona to get fuel for generators and food supplies. There was a police road block at McNeil Road near the railway line at the entrance into town on Coronation Road.

The police said we could go in and get what we needed, but that we had to go to Control Headquarters up at the Rec Centre to get a permit to come back out of town. They said it wouldn't be any trouble as people before us didn't have any trouble getting permits.

So we drove up to the Rec Centre, No Control Headquarters there! Just lots of cars/residents for a community meeting. So we drove down to the town oval.

We were absolutely astonished by what we saw. It looked like there were 100's of Fire Truck units and 4WD Fire units parked in and around the oval.

There were several police units, trucks and cars. Also many Parks and Wildlife vehicles. There were many many transportable buildings set up in and around the oval being used as supposed administration and control of the fires and everyones movements. There was Western Power personel and buildings and generators. There were thousands of DFES, Parks and Wildlife, Western Power and police personel and crews sitting around talking, eating and drinking.

Basically not doing anything. There were several catering vans.

Helicopters flying in and out continually.

After asking several officers where to go and who to see to get a permit, we were shown to a transportable office to see the "Officer in charge of Permits"!!

We were then told that we had to wait as it was shift changeover time and the Control Officer had to have a meeting with the Incident Control Officer and other people of authority to determine whether or not they will give out permits or not.

After at least an hour, an officer from DFES who thought he was very important and milked the whole situation as a drama as long as he could, looked at a map showing the fire area and wanted to know where we lived and wanted to go to get home. He did this with us and several other people that were wanting to get home as well. He said depending on where we lived,

would determine whether or not we would get a permit. We were then asked to wait for the officer that writes the permits!!

Andrew and I decided we would go and get our supplies and fuel for the generators whilst we waited for the permit.

We did so then went back and waited and waited. At this time the Heads of all the different departments were still deciding whether or not to write out permits.

After 2 hours or so total, we received our permit to leave town and head for home.

Whilst we were there, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were there trying to get a permit as well [REDACTED] was ropeable!! As he was told he needed to get a permit to shift his burnt cattle from one of his properties. He was in no danger and just wanted to get back to his property and dispose of his dead cattle, but they would not allow him back to his property until they had ok'd it with Control Headquarters. [REDACTED] said that this was ridiculous and that he needed to be able to deal with things on his own property.

He said the inaction and total madness of bureaucracy along with DFES had done nothing to assist the locals and contractors and are more of a hinderance than a help.

After we received our permit, we spoke to several people that lived out of town that had decided to skip the permit crap and find a back way home so as not to come upon police blocks.

Everyone just needed to get home and defend their properties.

To top it off, just before we received our permit, the Waroona Shire CEO waltzed up to a group of us waiting and shouted "No permits needed" If you want to get out of town and back to your properties, go for it!

Andrew and I couldn't believe it. He had no authority to do or say that and it proved a total lack of respect and knowledge of what was going on and obviously nobody communicates on a level that's needed in these situations.

We headed home. Just over the railway line the police asked to see our permit. We showed it to them and they let us go.

So 3 hours after leaving home to get fuel and supplies in Waroona, we got home.



## Submission to Waroona Bushfire Special Enquiry

4 March 2016

We are dairy farmers who were affected by the bushfire which burnt through 1/3 of our farm starting on the evening of Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016. We would like to comment on 3 things contained within the terms of reference, namely:

1. (c) *The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire;*

We are concerned that the fire was allowed to become a threat to so many, with severe fire weather alerts forecast for the area in its path for the following days. I watched the fire grow from the reported 8 ha area to become the storm cell which dropped burning embers on our property from many kilometres away. Subsequent bushfires (e.g. Uduc) have employed aerial support early on to contain and control bushfires. We strongly support this approach.

- (g)(iv) *Management of people seeking to return to their properties;*

We managed to save the most valuable infrastructure on our property as we remained to defend it, had our own fire-fighting equipment and water supply and access was clear early on in the incident for our competent and well-equipped friends and neighbours to gain access to help us. If we had not received this support from our farming friends, we believe we would have lost everything.

Within an hour of the fire starting on our property, the road leading to our farm was closed by emergency services personnel. Two well-equipped 4WD vehicles with fire-fighting units and 2000L water, driven by friends who were coming to help us, were not allowed access. If they had been permitted in to help us, the job of defending our property (6+ lives; 300 cattle; 2 homes; numerous sheds, major power lines and infrastructure) would have been easier, safer and more successful.

A second event occurred on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January when our own fire-fighting unit started to fail. We desperately needed this operational to continue defending our property as the fire was still burning that day. In fact, the property was water-bombed that morning to assist us in saving a home. We are grateful for that! However, as we needed a replacement unit, I left the property taking our 2 young children with me, drove to Pinjarra to buy the nearest available fire-fighting unit, and was stopped at the roadblock on the SW Highway at the Greenlands Road roundabout and not allowed to return to our property on Buller Road in Hamel.

This was essential fire-fighting equipment I had on board, needed to defend property and lives, and it was not allowed to return as the road was closed. The police on duty were very polite and helpful, and advised me that it would be possible for a vehicle to drive up from Waroona, and as long as they did not actually exit the road, that they would be able to transfer the unit from my car to theirs and return home. This is what we did, but it gives the impression that the only dangerous section of road was the 5cm strip of white line at the Greenlands Road roundabout! I believe we needed to be allowed to return home to continue the job we had competently been doing since 9:30 pm on 6<sup>th</sup> January. Blocking us caused significant distress to me, our children, and those awaiting our speedy return.

3. *The need for further reform.*

I would like to suggest the need for some form of identification for property owners, which would allow quick assessment by emergency services personnel controlling roadblocks, enabling them to grant us and other landholders access to defending our own properties in bushfires. It may take the form of an identification card showing name, address, and training completed. It may contain a statement that we are taking responsibility for staying and defending our property. To support this, we would like to receive suitable training in bushfire risk management and fighting fires. We are dairy farmers, so are not able to sign up to become volunteer fire fighters to gain this training as we are not able to stop milking to attend a callout.

We are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission and request that it be considered. We would also like to be kept informed of the progress of the enquiry.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature]

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[Redacted address line 1]

[Redacted address line 2]

# January 2016 Waroona Bushfire

Submission from [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Phone [REDACTED]

My name is [REDACTED]. My husband [REDACTED] and I, along with my 81 year old mum [REDACTED], suffered significant losses to our 475 acre farm, located on [REDACTED] Cookernup, on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> January 2016. I am willing to present my submission at a public hearing if needed.

I hope this is clear to read and addresses the terms of reference, and not too much of a story telling event. I have only addressed the points important to me during this situation, and what I feel I am qualified to speak of.

I believe everyone who fought the fires did the best they could. But nanny-state governing is restricting our efforts to prevent potential damages and lawfully defend our assets.

1.(a)

Our land boundaries 2 gazetted roads (Riverdale Rd and Clifton Rd), 2 parcels of crown land (Riverdale Reserve and land west of East Break), and 2 privately owned farms. Any boundary fence shared with another farmer suffered little or no damage due to conscientious owners keeping the fences clear of vegetation such as woody weeds, trees and debris. We share ownership, stewardship and responsibility of the fence asset. Any boundary fence shared with government was destroyed by the fire, due to being fuelled by uncontrolled vegetation growing through from their side. The West Australian government absolves all ownership, stewardship and responsibility for said asset. See photograph 1, taken before the fire.

I believe the lack of firebreaks from the crown land side contributed to the damage, and also hindered the ability of the fire-fighters by restricting access.

Restoration of property rights is integral, allowing us to lawfully clear areas of bushland that we, as stewards of the land, can see had the potential to be high risk in a bushfire event. Our neighbour, Kim Hough, had requested to DPAW to undertake a controlled burn to Riverdale Reserve, which was refused. Had we been allowed to keep these roadsides clear of fuel build-up, I believe our fence assets would have survived with little or no damage. The fires travelled along these woody corridors gaining strength, leading to more damage elsewhere on our property.

1.(e)

My husband saved our house only because of our own power and water supply. Living on a farm we are able to justify this. It is unconscionable to expect a person living in a gazetted town site such as Yarloop to have to supply their own power and water to defend their homes. I would like to see a response from this inquiry as to the failure of the water supply to Yarloop before she burned down.

1.(g) (i)

We evacuated on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> Jan at 9pm of our own choice, not based on advice from the DFES website, not from the ABC radio, but from where we saw the fire heading toward our farm from a northerly direction. We tried to drive east towards Cookernup town site to our other farm where my 81 year old mum lives. We were stopped at a roadblock, manned by volunteer fire-fighters. I was told words that will chill me for the rest of my life - "YARLOOP IS LOST. WE CANNOT DEFEND HER. YOU MUST EVACUATE IN A SOUTH WEST DIRECTION NOW." At that point I believe Cookernup town site was also at risk. The landline phone system was still operational, so I called my mum and she drove west to our farm and evacuated with us.

On Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January, around 3pm, my husband was approached on the farm by a man in a fast attack vehicle and was told to evacuate. I believe this vehicle was travelling to all residences in the area to warn them of the danger. At this point only 1/3 of our farm had been damaged by the fire. We evacuated again at 5pm.

1.(g) (iv) (h)

On Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January 7am, and again on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> at 6am, we tried to return to the farm to assess the damage and check on the welfare of our commercial cattle herd. While we appreciate the efforts of the authorities to prevent unlawful entry to the fire zone, and to protect people from returning to a dangerous situation, this needs to be managed in a better way. We absolutely needed to return to our cattle, as they could have been horribly injured and suffering. The time spent trying to gain access could have been better spent on the farm putting out spot fires which ultimately flared up into full blown uncontrolled fires – which is what happened at 12pm on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January. A change of wind blew sparks from one smouldering stump towards some unburned trees, which exploded into a catastrophic fire which destroyed the remaining 1/3 of our farm, severely threatened our house (that is when I called 000) and destroyed several sheds and chookhouse including many chickens, burned alive.

Perhaps we could be treated as consenting adults and a register and contact details taken of all persons returning. We evacuated for personal safety reasons, we are not going to risk our lives or our family's lives just to go home for the sake of it.

Annually, we are asked by the authorities

"Are you prepared for bushfire?"

"What is your backup plan if the power and water supplies fail?"

"Have you got an evacuation plan?"

Well, I would like to know from the authorities, What was their plan for Yarloop?

Photograph 1. 1.(a) Re: Pre-incident prevention.

This was taken 10/11/2014. This is our western boundary fence on the right – can you see it? All the trees are growing through the fence from the government's side. I believe if we were able to keep the fence lines clear of vegetation and to a safe distance on both sides of the property, damage would be kept to a minimum. It would be helpful for there to be a firebreak on the other side, and also for the government to keep their side clear too.



4 March 2016

[REDACTED]

Mobile [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH  
WA 6005

By email: [WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:WaroonalInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au).

Dear Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM

**RE: RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE IN RELATION TO THE PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO JANUARY 2016 WAROONA FIRE**

Since the Dwellingup fire of February 2007, I have been assessing and analysing the high level of catastrophic bushfires in Western Australia and to this end I believe I have some solutions, which may assist in the management of such.

- I hold a Diploma of Occupational Health and Safety, Diploma of Management (Quality Auditing) qualification.
- Have worked as a risk surveyor and assessor for the past 9 years.
- Have completed the ICAM Investigation Course (Incident Cause Analysis Method).
- Have forty-seven years broad experience in the heavy road transport and earthmoving sector including maintenance, driving and operating multi combination vehicles, operations management, and OH & S and risk investigation.
- I am the current and founding Chairman of Transafe WA (a not for profit industry association focusing on safer outcomes for the road transport industry).

I offer the following brief submission and I would be grateful for the opportunity to be heard at the Public Inquiry.

**Terms of Reference**

1. In relation to items (a) to (d) it appears there has been no effectiveness to any of the items listed. This is also supported by comments too numerous to mention from people affected by the fires. I have briefly inspected the town of Yarloop and whilst the fire was large it is my opinion, had sufficient equipment, manpower and prompt response been applied, damage could have been reduced and lives saved. However there seems to have been confusion all over during the emergency, which prevented a well-organised operation to counter the fire,

communicate with at risk people, and evacuate relevant residents. Had all been in order then there would possibly been no loss of life.

2. I took particular interest in the Keelty Report into the Margaret River Bushfire and many of the problems from this disaster seem to be relevant in relation to the Yarloop disaster. A good example is whilst listening at one community meeting in relation to Margaret River the community expressed it felt it had been let down particularly in relation to welfare support. Many of the people escaped with the clothes on their back and had no credit cards or cash to support them.

It appears we have not learned a lot from previous catastrophic fires, which are on the increase in terms of numbers and fatalities. Perusing information on fires between January 1961 and December 2003 five major fires occurred, these being Dwellingup January 1961, Southwest April 1978, Woorooloo January 1997, Perth and Southwest January 1997 and Tenterden in December 2003. This amounts to five fires over 42 years with six fatalities. Since February 2007 we have had Dwellingup, December 2007 Boorabin, December 2009 Toodyay, January 2011 Lake Clifton, February 2011 Roleystone/Kelmscott, November 2011 Margaret River, January 2014 Parkerville, January 2015 Northcliffe, November 2015 Esperance; and in January 2016 the fires which affected Waroona, Harvey and Yarloop which was severely damaged and probably will never be the same again.

The reality is that in nine years we have encountered ten major fires with the loss of nine lives, which shows a very major escalation from the previous years from 1961 to 2003. What is more alarming is that six fatalities have occurred within two months.

Rural and semi rural communities live in fear of wondering which town will be next to succumb to bushfire.

The Keelty report concentrated on changed management and did not consider any changes to the way fires are countered in terms of equipment, which had been a major downfall in the community's ability to defend itself from catastrophic fire. Based on data and events and lost lives it must be concluded if the findings of the Keelty report have been implemented then they have failed.

3. The failure of agencies to apply continuous improvement methodology to their operations has been a contributing factor in hindering the ability to counter fires. Canadian company Safety Boss has been using larger more mobile equipment for many years and reported the following quote in relation to a forest fire it tended in 2003.

***“In August of 2003 a lightning strike set off a fire in extreme conditions in heavy timber close to cluster of rural homes. Within one and half hours from the initial call the RTFT arrived (from its base over 100 kms away) on site ready for action. A close by storage shed was fully involved and several of the houses were already smouldering and ready to go into full flame. With its long-range turret and all terrain ability within 25 minutes the Oshkosh was able to cover all of the nearest 6 houses with foam and begin the attack on the near edge of the forest. By this time the additional support of a ground crew and water trucks had arrived and the fire was isolated and extinguished in less than four hours.”***

The Canadian option has now been superseded and the organisation has gone on to be more involved in oilwell fires. However other more efficient options are available.

There is much confusion and dysfunction in relation to what may counter which fire when and where. Some agencies have equipment, which is not compatible with

fighting bush fires. Fire trucks have to leave the fire to recharge with water losing valuable time in fighting fires.

Many are calling for a new agency to take control of country bush fires. Many are very wary of another bureaucratic agency being formed when the existing peak agency cannot provide protection to the community. We must not lose focus on what is the best management methodology to fight fires. We have many fine examples of not for profit organisations working in emergency services with Government support. Some of these are St John Ambulance, Royal Flying Doctor Service and the various sea rescue groups who do a fine job and at a cost far less than government could provide.

It is my belief that the majority of infrastructure and equipment is available in the existing volunteer Bushfire Brigades. What is needed is a separation of powers to allow country volunteers to manage their own fires. Local areas are best served with local solutions. The simple reality is the quicker fires are countered the greater the chance of extinguishing the fire. In addition to this any new structured country fire organisation needs the ability to go onto any property as rapidly as possible to counter any fire, which presents as a risk. This is currently a problem between agencies which must I repeat must be resolved. It may also be that any voluntary organisations may need on occasions the authority to overrule local government authorities if required in an emergency.

A new not for profit volunteer organisation could be created from existing volunteer organisations which could have a far greater efficiency in controlling fires, with more modern and advanced equipment thus reducing the risk to volunteer fire fighters with the utilisation of heavier duty fire fighting equipment.

I chair a not for profit organisation which is focused on the reduction of accidents in the road transport industry. This model could also be used in rural Western Australia to create awareness and bring communities together to constantly have continuous improvement strategies and relevant risk put on the agenda to find simple solutions to what could turn into complex problems without due risk identification. This could be achieved with minimal expense.

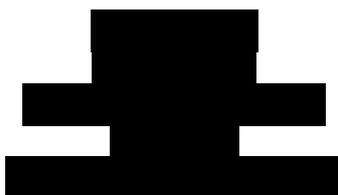
Departments set targets to burn forest fuel. My understanding is the relevant department has not been achieving its targets, which creates further risk due to the large build up of forest floor fuel. This needs to change and if departments are not achieving their targets then perhaps other ways of achieving this needs to be looked at by way of using contractors if necessary.

There is much to be done however from a professional risk reduction view these are the fundamental changes which need to be addressed before we find out state confronting a situation such as Black Saturday in Victoria.

I would be happy to expand on my thoughts if requested to attend a formal hearing.

Yours sincerely

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4 March 2016

Euan Ferguson  
Special Inquirer  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
[WaroonaInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:WaroonaInquiry@semc.wa.gov.au).

### Submission to Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

#### **Introduction**

This is a submission that the terms of reference of the Special Inquiry should be construed so that it can make a general inquiry into the fire regime that should be practiced in WA's native forests. Most of the terms of reference address aspects of the January 2016 fires but they also include directions to consider the reports into earlier post 2011 fires so the scope of the inquiry is wider than the forests affected in January. Moreover, general provisions in the terms of reference, notably paragraphs 1(a) and 2(b), viz:

The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities;... and

The effectiveness of reforms implemented by the State since 2011 on the State's ability to prevent, mitigate and respond to major bushfires and the community's understanding of and preparedness for bushfire risk. [emphases added]

cannot be sensibly answered without considering the general issue of the fire regime(s) to be practiced in WA forests as well as the particular issues of the Waroona fire.

About a year ago, in the wake of the fires at Northcliffe and Boddington, I wrote to the Premier and the Minister for the Environment, in the same terms, suggesting that there should be a Royal Commission\* into controlled [prescribed] burning in WA's native forests. On 9 March 2015 the Premier replied stating, inter alia, that:

The Western Australian Government continues to support the application of prescribed burning as a means of reducing forest fuel loadings...

Mr Jacob had similarly replied that the government '...strongly supports prescribed burning as the main tool to reduce the impacts of bushfires.' For these reasons the Premier concluded that a Royal Commission into prescribed burning was not 'required.'

In disclaiming the need for a Royal Commission into prescribed burning the Premier advised that the government would be undertaking a 'high level governance review into bushfire response and mitigation efforts' through the State Emergency Management Committee

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\* I suggested a Royal Commission as a means of having an inquiry that is independent and of appropriate standing and an inquiry under the Public Sector Management Act can achieve that.

(SEMC). In February 2016 the SEMC published the *Bushfires Review 2015 O'Sullivan and Lower Hotham*.<sup>\*</sup> This is one of the five reviews of fires from 2011 that the Special Inquiry is directed to consider.

Fire policy is now the biggest issue of forest conservation in Western Australia in 2016. In successive years we have had the O'Sullivan and Lower Hotham fires, which burned 147,000ha, more than the 1961 Dwellingup fire, including areas of the Shannon National Park, and the Waroona fire, which burned areas of the Lane-Poole Reserve. The policies of the Premier and Minister quoted at page 1, of 'continu[ing] to support the application of prescribed burning', which were written in the weeks after the O'Sullivan and Lower Hotham fire, are plainly not working when in the very next fire season there is a major forest fire and, to put it in context, they are the biggest forest fires since the Dwellingup fire of 1961, viz in a period of 55yrs.<sup>1</sup> The policies that the Premier and Minister paraphrase are the received wisdom in forest policy in Western Australia for the last 60+ yrs. It is instructive to put this in historical context.

### **Prescribed burning in Western Australia**

The fire policy in Western Australia from the inception of professional forestry and the Forests Department in 1918 was exclusion. By the fifties it was recognized that this was not working and a policy of prescribed burning was introduced by the Forests Department to

...systematically reduc[e] the accumulated fuel by rotational prescribed burning over the whole forest...<sup>2</sup>

A Royal Commission in 1961 conducted by GJ Rodger, previously Conservator of Forests in South Australia and Commonwealth Director General of Forests, in the wake of the Dwellingup and Karridale fires endorsed the Forests Department's then recently introduced practice of control burning.<sup>3</sup> This report is a seminal document in the development of fire policy in WA as it commended and gave external authority to a prior policy of the Forests Department - at a time when that was a matter of heightened public concern because of the Dwellingup fire.

In 1989 prescribed (and aerial) burning was credited by foresters with the fact that there had only been three fires since 1965 in excess of 400ha in the northern Jarrah forest.<sup>4</sup> That is an impressive statistic when it is considered that it covers 24yrs and that the Dwellingup fire, in that area, covered 140,000ha. Prescribed burning had also been introduced in the Karri forests.<sup>5</sup>

In 1961 all the forest that Mr Rodger reported on was state forest, administered under the *Forests Act 1918*, vested in the Forests Department, dedicated overwhelmingly to production forestry

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\* In October 2015, before the commencement of the 2015/16 fire season, operationally useful information was made available to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DEPAW).

<sup>1</sup> Nours Group: *Major incident review of the Lower Hotham and O'Sullivan fires*. DFES 2015 fig 7 page 15

<sup>2</sup> Bradshaw FJ et al: 'The Jarrah forest; a case study in multiple use' in McKinnell, FH et al (eds): *Forest Management in Australia*. IFA (WA Div.)1991 page 10.

<sup>3</sup> GJ Rodger: *Report of the Royal Commission appointed to enquire into and report upon the bush fires of December 1960 and January, February and March 1961 in Western Australia*. 1961, page 59

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw FJ et al: 'The Jarrah forest; a case study in multiple use' in McKinnell, FH et al (eds): *Forest Management in Australia*. IFA (WA Div.)1991 pages 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Underwood, RJ et al: The Karri forest, Western Australia in McKinnell, FH et al (eds): *Forest Management in Australia*. IFA (WA Div.)1991 pages 28-30.

and run by foresters. But that has changed. From the 1970s there were campaigns to have national parks and nature reserves excised from state forests. These succeeded in the 1980s and two of the iconic outcomes of that movement, the Shannon National Park and the Lane-Poole Reserve, were affected by the O’Sullivan and Waroona fires, respectively, of 2015 and 2016. After that conservationists campaigned to save old growth native forests within state forest, viz. outside the national parks and nature reserves, and controversies over Regional Forest Agreements dominated forest politics in the 1990s. That issue was settled when the Gallop Labor government was elected in 2001. Production forestry is now a less important management objective relative to the conservation of natural values of the forests.

In this process there have been substantial legislative and administrative changes. In 1984 the *Forests Act 1918* was repealed and the Forests Department subsumed into the Department of Conservation and Land Management which has subsequently undergone a number of iterations. And foresters have been disestablished from their legislative position of preeminence in determining the course of events in forest management. The forests; state forest, national park and nature reserve, are currently vested in the Conservation Commission and managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

The situation in 2016 is that, consistent with the practices of the last 60+ years a regime of prescribed burning is practiced in WA’s forests by the Department of Parks and Wildlife. The statistics of the last five annual reports indicate that the areas actually burned are markedly less than what the Department estimates as the target to achieve their objectives.

**Prescribed Burns 2010/11-2014/15<sup>6</sup>**

	Indicative Target (ha)	Area actually burned (ha)
2010/2011	200,000	136,746
2011/2012	200,000	103,165
2012/2013	200,000	23,468
2013/2014	200,000	78,234
2014/2015	200,000	147,082

No particular point is drawn from that other than to note that the area actually burned was less than the indicative target every year, markedly so in 2012/2013, and that over the five year period the area burned was less than half the cumulative indicative target. In May 2015 the government announced a further \$20 million to fund extra burning to catch up on the backlog.<sup>7</sup> The Wilderness Society objected that ‘the funds should be directed to early fire detection and rapid suppression.’<sup>8</sup>

Apart from not meeting targeted rates of prescribed burning for the last five years it needs to be noted that there has been a decline in the area subject to prescribed burns over the half century since 1961 from almost 500,000 ha the year after the Dwellingup fire, and consistently above 300,000 ha per annum until the mid-eighties, which makes the indicative targets of 2010-2015 seem modest.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Parks and Wildlife/Department of Environment and Conservation: *Annual reports 2010/11-2014/15*

<sup>7</sup> Minister for Environment and Heritage: *Extra \$20million for prescribed burning program*. Media statement 11 May 2015

<sup>8</sup> ABC News: *Wilderness society criticises WA prescribed burn plan, but shire says it is crucial* 12 May 2013 downloaded 2 March 2016

<sup>9</sup> Nous Group: *Major incident review of the Lower Hotham and O’Sullivan fires*. DFES 2015 Figure 8 page 17

The point that is inescapable is that the prescribed burning program has failed. The stated objective is to:

...mitigate the severity of bushfires and to help protect lives and property by reducing the build-up of flammable fuel loads...<sup>10</sup>

This is the consistent rationale of prescription burning since the fifties. But, as hitherto noted, it is plainly not working when in the last two years there have been the largest wildfires in the forests in over fifty years.

Whether that is because:

- indicative targets of prescribed burning were not achieved over the last five years;
- there has been a consistent decline in the area of forest subject to prescribed burning over the last 30yrs; or
- prescribed burning is not an effective means of preventing fires,

or some combination of these - or some other reason(s)- is a question that the Special Inquiry should address.

### **Issues before the Special Inquiry**

The situation in Western Australia with respect to forest fire policy is analogous to that of 1961. The state has experienced major forest fires that have devastated a town and prompted a Royal Commission/*Public Sector Management Act* Special Inquiry which is being conducted by a senior forester from the eastern states.

In reviewing the interregnum between the two inquiries the Special Inquiry should ask why there was a 'golden era' from 1961 to the mid-eighties when the area burnt out by fires in the forests was very low compared with the last two years and, subsequently, a period through until recently when the area affected by fire was still low compared with the last two years. And, importantly, can the answers to those questions provide the basis for a fire regime that will prevent a repeat of the fires of 2015 and 2016.

As previously noted, when prescription burning commenced in WA's forests timber production was effectively the only management objective in the forests. With the diversification of tenures and management objectives conservation of natural values is now the principal management objective in Western Australian forests. The management programs which include prescribed burning have been approved by agencies such as DPAW and its predecessors which are committed to the conservation of natural areas.

In making recommendations to alter the fire regime practiced in WA forests the Special Inquiry should have regard to the management objectives that now prevail in Western Australia's forests. If what the Special Inquiry regards as the most desirable fire regime is inconsistent with those management objectives that should be reported to the government as it would be a matter for the government and the parliament to resolve.

In considering the impact of fire regimes on forests a number of disciplines are involved. The Special Inquirer is a forester. The Special Inquiry should ensure that it has access to a wide range of advice on the impact of various scenarios on the forests.

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Parks and Wildlife Prescribed burning [nd, information sheet downloaded, 2 March 2016]

Submission from [REDACTED]

- Background - I rent [REDACTED] in Yarloop from Alcoa and have lived on the property for c. 10 years. The house is c. 0.5km West of the town of Yarloop. Almost the entire property was burnt out in the fire, including almost all paddocks, fences and a shed, although the house was saved despite the fire burning all around.
- I lost access to the DFES website at c. 3pm on the day of the fire when I lost power and land line access.
- Telstra mobile services were intermittent during the day and night of the fire, as they have been since Telstra 'upgraded' mobile services to 4G.
- I never received an SMS notification about the Yarloop fire, although did receive one in the subsequent days for Harvey.
- On the night of the fire (Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January) I intended to stay and protect the house.
- I thought that the fire danger had died down - because the helicopters seemed to have stopped dropping water and the smoke and ash in the air died down.
- To my knowledge, there was no back burning or clearing undertaken on the day of the fire to protect Yarloop.
- Given that the c. 50km/hour winds were consistently forecast in a direction which would push the fire towards the town of Yarloop and west to the coast, why was Yarloop not even mentioned on the DFES website until it was already on fire? The town must surely have been indefensible given the lack of back burning and clearing, strength and direction of wind and fuel load in the area? (Even though I had lost power my children were monitoring around the clock across time zones).
- At approx 8pm while sitting at the kitchen table having something to eat there was a very strong gust or blast of wind. I looked down through the house and saw a red glow which seemed pretty close.
- I went out to see the fire approaching very fast so I opened the gates to let the cattle out and then put the dog in the car and drove to the corner of Wickham Rd and Clifton Rd and watched the fire as it burned around the house.
- The fire then started behind the pub onto a block owned by Alcoa and leased to a farmer there was a very high fuel load and then the fire really picked up momentum.

- When the fire got to Wickham road it could possibly been stopped from going south and west. All through this a lot of fire units went up and down Clifton road and one never stopped to see if we were ok.
- I came back to the farm at about 12.30am and doused smouldering trees around the house then I found the stockyards burning and the sleepers under the fuel tanks smouldering.
- I then went to Brockman and Clifton Roads to find a fire unit. I got one and they came help me but there was some discussion on whether they would put the above fires out as they said that they had to conserve water. However they took pity on me and put the said fires out. This was about 6am they were the only fire unit that I saw.
- On the morning of the 8th we had no stock water, no fences and no water fittings (as they were destroyed in the big shed that had burned down completely). We had to get fencing material water fittings and petrol to keep our generators going.
- The road blocks following the fire (outside of the town of Yarloop) seemed excessive and unnecessary given there was nothing left to burn. There was no compromise or regard for the welfare of livestock or people in the area.
- I am 74 years old and was on the property on your own. Despite this my son was turned away from the area when he travelled from Perth to provide assistance on Monday 11th January. He was only allowed access on Tuesday 12th January following extensive phone negotiations. There was no immediate danger in the area as the fire had passed through on the Thursday evening. (If anything it was beneficial to have people there to monitor hot spots).
- The road blockages made no allowance for the fact that farmers had livestock which needed to be taken care of, let alone the 'people welfare' aspects for farmers in the area. There doesn't seem to have been any consideration given to the needs of livestock and farmers during this period. On my property the water pipes had burnt out and I needed to restore that to provide water for cattle as soon as possible given the excessive temperatures during that period. I also had to obtain feed, gather cattle who had fled when let out to avoid the fire, restore some emergency fencing, treat any who had been burnt or suffered from the smoke, connect the generator to the house to provide power for fridges, buy food etc given that power was out for almost 3 weeks.
- I was repeatedly stopped when trying to get into Waroona to get emergency supplies in or der to achieve these things and forced to break the law and drive through roadblocks. One of my neighbours, an 80 year old woman, was also prevented from using the roads and forced to drive cross country over rough paddocks and ditches in order to be able to get to and from her own property.

- Further one of my daughters attempted to drive down on Friday 15th January and was also turned away (cnr Johnson Road and Forrest Hwy) although allowed through when she persisted. The fire was nowhere to be seen at this point.

Mr Euan Ferguson,  
Level 6 Dumas house  
2 Havelock Street  
West Perth WA 6005.

### **Waroona bushfire special inquiry submission.**

Dear Mr Ferguson,

I write to you as a retired forester following my career starting prior to the Dwellingup fire in 1961. I can only ask you to read this message and pass it on to your colleagues. I write this report based on a working lifetime of practical experience, science based fire mitigation and suppression.

I have been watching and reading the media referring to the recent Yarloop wild fire disaster. I can only say how disappointed I am with their reports, the political input and the failure of all of the various responsible agencies to express their outrage that these events can simply be condoned and accepted.

It is particularly disappointing when our elected premier simply claims nothing could have stopped this fire and questions the effectiveness and benefits of fuel reduction burning in wildfire mitigation, instead preferring to use the popular, misleading global warming excuse.

There is only one Jarrah forest in this world; it is divided by many land tenure's and managed by numerous agencies all with responsibility for parts of its protection, maintenance and multipurpose productive capacity.

It is a sad fact that not one agency or politician has come out and offered an apology to the taxpayers and residents of this state for their agencies failure to properly protect this unique world heritage forest, the Township of Yarloop, the destruction of historic heritage icons, softwood production plantation forest and massive damage to farming and public infrastructure, and sadly the loss of lives.

The cost to the public in replacing damaged Power lines, road bridges, and a host of other public infrastructure, will handsomely exceed many annual budgets required to complete the approved and effective, regular fuel and fire hazard reduction prescribed burning programme.

The real tragedy is in the future quality of the forest together with its native plants and animals. Australian native forests can tolerate frequent mild fire without damage; they cannot tolerate infrequent wild fire of high intensity causing total defoliation and bark to separate from the stem. The dry sides on trees caused by high intensity wild fire allow free entry to the wood by wood damaging insects and fungi. The resulting damage to wood quality is carried for the rest of the trees life. By allowing wild fire's to continue to become more frequent and intense we are destroying the very heritage we want to pass on to future generations.

The irreparable fire damage to the regrowth jarrah forest, its companion plants, animals, birds and biotica is unforgivable and stays with the crop forever.

Not a word from all of the responsible government funded agencies for their failure to protect the public forests. This includes the Conservation Council, EPA, DPAW, FPC, DEFES, Water Authorities, Shire councils, unions, green groups, and many others, none of them expressing their outrage, concern or admission of failure to uphold their responsibility for forest protection on behalf of the long suffering public, the present generation and of course future generations.

I also draw your attention to the loss of the softwood plantation estate. This multi-million dollar public investment was given scant acknowledgement by the FPC spokesperson, who during a media interview gave a Ho-hum response, indicating the loss was of little significance. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Nor have I seen or heard any comment from the respective responsible state and commonwealth government ministers, the government opposition or the greens who have also remained impotent and silent. It can only be assumed the jarrah forest is of no value to all of these agencies now or in the future and wild fire is to be accepted as the new management norm. This is a disgrace and not only lets down the people of Western Australia but also the people of Australia and the world.

It is a mystery as to the destruction of hundreds if not thousands of hectares of regenerated vegetation on mine sites. These areas, some with unburnt fuels over 30 years old, complicated fire management and without doubt contributed to the increased catastrophic fire behaviour and intensity resulting in the destruction of Yarloop.

Will the mining lease holders be required to rehabilitate and manage these areas for all values including protection from wild fire or will they simply be left as monuments and a legacy of our failure to protect the Jarrah forest environment for future generations?

It is particularly galling when the 40,000 year old history of fire in the Australian native forest is now ignored. It is also unforgivable that today the population is ignorant of the proven, well understood, science based, researched and demonstrated fact that mild fire fuel reduction burning does mitigate fire intensity without harming the forest, native vegetation, birds or animals.

Why is it so hard for people to accept the science and history of prescribed hazard and fuel reduction mild fire, when they embrace global warming without question?

The annual cost of prescribed mild fire, this essential, environmentally beneficial and sustainable activity, pales into insignificance when compared with the increasing annual cost of wild fire suppression, the destruction of whole towns, communities and irreplaceable forests.

It is now quite clear the word “FORESTRY” and the profession of “FORESTRY” is considered a dirty word in Western Australia and must never again pass the lips of politicians of any persuasion and can only be mentioned in the media if there is the slightest opportunity to denigrate the profession and the industries and interests forestry supports.

The media delights in generating controversy, reporting sensation, and creating fear. Nothing is better than the slightest whiff of smoke over Perth from a hazard reduction burn or the vision of a freshly harvested logging coup to set their adrenalin rushing and the instant, intense, public search for someone to crucify.

Visual media featuring firefighting aircraft and total community destruction is particularly orgasmic and given extended air time. It is unfortunate the same desire to inform and educate the public on proven, available fire mitigation techniques are not given the same media support.

As the clever country we all must accept the history, understand the science and shoulder the responsibility we hold for the protection and productive future of our forests.

The political action by past governments to take foresters out of the forest to appease the greens is now coming home to roost.

In the interest of forests for the future, put the foresters back, give them the support they must have and allow them to manage the forests for all values including fire protection, timber production, conservation and recreation.

Fuel and hazard reduction by controlled mild fire is one obvious tool available that results in effective, affordable native vegetation protection and wild fire mitigation. However it must be well planned, publicly supported, financed, implemented and applied to both public and private land to ensure effective and consistent results into the future.

Recommendations are attached.

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02.03.2016

## Public Inquiry into January 2016 Waroona Fire.

### Recommendations.

- Provide public education to ensure WA residents understand and support prescribed mild fire across all land tenures.
- Provide media education so they understand, support and promote fire mitigation as a public responsibility.
- State government to insist that all government departments contribute to their responsibility in fire mitigation and fire management on all lands under their control.
- Private land owners with native vegetation locked up on their properties to be given government help in fire mitigation management. Land owners did not ask to have this land locked up and fire management is often beyond owner's capacity.
- Government to accept responsibility for protection, and regeneration of all native vegetation on crown land, state forest, reserves and national parks.
- Understand regeneration of native vegetation relies on managed fire.
- Shire districts to join with DPAW, FPC and all other government departments with a land management role to provide a stable, well trained, dedicated, equipped and funded firefighting core of 1 person for each 5,000 hectares of plantation and another person for each 10,000 hectares of native vegetation within their shire boundary.
- This core would be employed to carry out fire mitigation preparation, prescribed mild fire burning and rapid response to wild fire.
- In the event of wild fire, they would be backed up by neighbouring districts and volunteers who would be directed by the core leaders with local knowledge, experience and access to resources.  
This was once a function of forestry gangs and carried out to great effect.
- Retain and increase the role of the air suppression helicopters to one of a prescribed fuel and hazard reduction role during the off season.
- The empire building, jealousy, mistrust and dysfunction between agencies must be overcome.
- Urgently review the road closure and land owners' legitimate movement to protect property, assets and livestock.
- Volunteers do great work but must be backed up with experienced, well trained, dedicated and professionally directed on the fire ground core firefighters.

I thank you for the opportunity to offer my thoughts and offer my experience  
Should you wish to accept it?



Mr. Euan Ferguson  
Waroona Bushfire Inquiry  
West Leederville, WA

Dear Sir

## **Submission to Inquiry into the Yarloop/Waroona Bushfire**

### **The Need For a Landscape Approach to Fuel Management**

One of the crucial factors in the rise of damaging bushfires in the last 20 years is the buildup of fuel on forested land across the south west of WA. This factor was directly responsible for the ember storm that destroyed the town of Yarloop.

On land vested in the Conservation Commission, managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, there is an annual program of fuel reduction burning of 200,000 ha that is aimed at keeping forest fuels within certain limits. DPAW burning program has consistently failed to reach its target, largely due to an imbalance in its policies in favour of recreation development and the pursuit of vague and unproven approaches to biodiversity conservation. The result is that overall forest fuel loads today are at least as high as they were prior to the disastrous 1961 fire season.

On land managed by DPAW the knowledge and skills for adequate fuel management still exist, but the agency needs to put fire management at the top of its priorities, and it needs more permanent field staff to achieve its burn targets. The loss of experienced field staff to the FPC has been a significant handicap as well.

There is a significant area of forested land, largely in small pockets, scattered across the State, vested in other Government agencies, such as Planning, Main Roads and Landcorp. None of these agencies make any attempt to manage the fuels on this land. Consequently they often carry very high fuel loads. In addition, there are a very large number of patches of forest-covered land held by local governments in a similar condition.

The third part of the landscape carrying heavy fuel is forest on private property. This is especially important at the urban/rural interface, with the rise of small subdivisions for people wanting a rural lifestyle. Good examples are the Perth Hills region and the hinterland of Dunsborough.

Unless the State has a fire management system that ensures that all these areas, across all land tenures, are adequately managed to keep fuel loads at a level where fire suppression is easy and safe for firefighters, we will continue to have fire disasters like Yarloop. A landscape approach to fuel management is required. The challenge for Government is to devise a system that effectively addresses this issue.

DFES is a failure. It has attempted to impose an inappropriate suppression-only approach to rural fire management, it has failed to address the fuel buildup problem, and it has antagonised volunteer bush firefighters. We need rural fire management to be in the hands of people who know what they are doing and who have no other agendas.

A Rural Fire Service that strongly promotes active fuel management on rural and peri-urban land, working closely with DPaW, would greatly improve the ability of the State to minimise bushfire damage.

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the author.

March 4, 2016

Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6 Dumas House  
Havelock St  
West Perth WA 6005



Submission for the Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

We live on a property of 42 hectares at [REDACTED] Wagerup. We have lived permanently for 40 years.

Terms of Reference

- 1 (f) The information from DFES for the ABC to broadcast by radio needs to be much more specific and refined i.e. Give regular NEW updated information not continually repeating the same information over many hours  
BE SPECIFIC WHERE THE FIRE IS ACTIVE
- (g) (ii) We had no communication during the course of the fire apart from ABC Radio messages  
The local captain of the Volunteer Brigade rang Wed evening 6th Jan 8.30pm landline and 1 mobile SMS at 10.09 pm There was no further contact with officials regarding the course of the fire
- (iv) BIG DEBACLE --- Pathetic and totally disorganised.. People issuing the passes (to return to property) after we'd collected fuel for generator sets and supplies Disgraceful  
We will elaborate in detail with our oral submission

3 For Bush fire management local knowledge is paramount

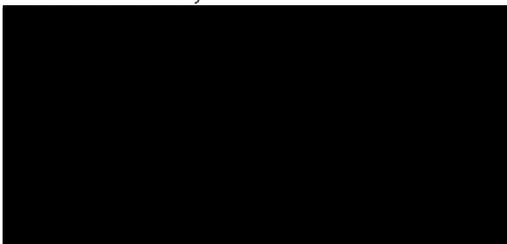
We would like to present our submission orally to a private hearing

We stayed and defended our home without any assistance

We have lost everything but our house, cars and garage

We would like to see a detailed summary of dates and times of tracking the active heads of this fire

Yours sincerely



01 03 2016

[REDACTED]

27<sup>th</sup> February, 2016

Euan Ferguson,  
Waroona Bushfire Enquiry,  
Level 6, Dumas House,  
2 Havelock Street,  
WEST PERTH, W.A. 6005

Dear Mr. Ferguson,

We wish to make a submission about the disastrous Waroona fire which occurred on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.

1. Personally our farm, [REDACTED] was 90% burnt, including a Hay Shed, 220 Rolls of Hay, six kilometres of fencing plus dry feed the cattle needed to eat for the next three months.
2. I am informed that this fire could have been stopped at Lane Pool Reserve. Two local contractors had bulldozers ready to construct fire breaks but were not allowed entry to crown land because of fear of die back spreading. Also water bombers were denied permission to help fight fires in the hills.
3. 430 farms were burnt like ours plus \$26 million costs for Western Power seems like a high price to pay, not to mention two lives and the town of Yarloop!!
4. Bureaucracy gone mad comes to mind when I think of the permit system for genuine farmers trying to care for their livestock and this certainly needs to be looked at for future reference. Maybe one permit to move between farms and town. I met the most obnoxious bureaucrat who treated genuine farmers twice his age like children, e.g. line up and I will see you one at a time!! We care about our Livestock who were roaming all over the district because of burnt down fences and also a danger for motorists on the road. Getting fuel for the fire fighting unit and to run a generator when the power was off for eleven days seemed not to much to ask without lining up for a permit that lasted only for one day.

In conclusion this fire was fanned by a very strong easterly wind and could not be stopped by firefighters once out of control but should have been stopped in the hills where it burnt for two days before it reached the uncontrollable stage.

We hope you recommend some changes such as access to state forrest and certainly a better system for movement of local farmers in the area who care for their animals.

[REDACTED]

acknowledgement email  
1/15

To Euan Ferguson,

My name is [REDACTED] I'm currently the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer for the shire of Murray a position I have held for the past four years.

During this time I have introduced a number of changes on how the brigades under my control operate. One of the changes is for fire fighters that attend an incident outside of the Murray district to fill in a Post Incident Questionnaire, there is no pressure on them to fill this form out. Over the years more and more volunteers fill this form out and I use it as a tool to make any changes I can at my level and I use it at regional meetings so I can put the opinions of volunteers out to the people who could and should make changes.

Following the Waroona/Yarloop fire I asked all my fire fighters that attended to fill in the questionnaire so I could forward them on when an inquiry was going to be held. Due to the lack of trust with DFES at the moment I gave a commitment to all my members that I would forward the forms on directly to the inquiry and not through DFES [REDACTED]

This is the most replies I have received after any large fire and I believe it is because more and more volunteers are getting frustrated at DEFAS not listening to what we are trying to tell them.

As I promised my members I have forwarded the forms on to yourself. These forms haven't been altered in any way and are the experiences of fire fighters that attended one of the worst fires we have seen in a long time.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself on the below number or email address if I can be of any assistance to you or the inquiry.

Yours Truly

[REDACTED]

Shire Of Murray Chief Bush Fire Control Officer  
West Murray Fire Control Officer, Captain

[REDACTED]



# Post Incident Questionnaire.

Incident Name or Number, 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment, North Dandalup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

**We were sent to Lake Clivton only to find out the control point was at Preston beach**

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

**We arrived at Preston Beach at 7.00, Tasked out at 8.30 then returned to station to regroup. 12.30 sent to flare up Haub rd Lack Clifton**

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

**Welfare was excellent**

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

**There was very poor use of local knowledge.**

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative, Mop up and black out very poor.

**\*We were not tasked promptly and were told to wait.**

**\*Could not find the dozer needed to do fire breaks.**

**\*Sector Commander should of talked to team members in a group and not as Individuals .**

**\*There was lots of discussions going on and every one was being told different things by different people.**

# Post Incident Questionnaire.

\*Incident controller from ACT was told to do a back burn south of Preston Beach Town site. We managed to talk him out of as it was 39degrees and a Sea breeze was expected that afternoon. He had no idea what the Sea Breeze was .Again poor use of local knowledge when it is available to be used.

\*Coms very poor.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323128

14/1/16

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North Dandalup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

**Welfare was poor.**

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

**Good local Knowledge**

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

**Radio coms was poor. Very poor mop up and black out**

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323128

6/1/16

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North Dandalup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

**Deployment was arranged by our brigade and was done very well**

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

**The deployment instruction and radio channels was given to myself and team members by our brigade and was up to date and correct . However on arrival at Waroona the channel we were told to use had been changed and we were not notified and had trouble contact anyone .After being task to Waroona Dam we were without radio coms all night .We were not given any phone numbers .However we did leave our phone numbers with control.**

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

**No we had been tasked to find the a small fire on Inveral Rd .When we arrived it was not a small fire at all it was huge and we didn't have the recourses to extinguish it.**

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

**We were extremely under resourced and no other units were sent to help .We were basically left to self manage with only 1x 3.4 1x2.4 and 1xLT We decided to go into asset protect of the main buildings at the caravan park. We manged to protect the caravan park building and camp ground .It was very disappointing to find out it had been lost a few davs later.**

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

**We had no food for the full shift .We were only feed at the end of the shift.**

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

**I think the incident was under resourced and under estimated .**

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

**With the lack of communication and resources fighting the fire that shift was extremely difficult.**

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 3233128 8/1/16

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North Dandalup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

**We were tasked by Waroona control at 06.15 and sent to lake Clifton.**

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

**Yes we could of been of more value if the sector commander had listened to advice.**

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

**Well fair was not supplied till around 16.30 that afternoon. The dozer operators had not been feed in 24 hours.**

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

**The sector commanders should of been from local bush fire brigades as local knowledge is extremely usefully.**

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

**After many conversation and request to sector commander metro [REDACTED] for complete black out 30 meters in and 100 meters high from the edge of all fire brakes and containment lines which was not done. The result was the fire continued to jump fire breaks.**

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Waroon / Yarloop

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Coolup 7-1-16 Texcom/Wash - PAW

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

No, I had to Ask more than once for a sector commander, phone number and com's channel.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

We waited 2 Hrs at control with 2 loaders, 2 floats and a 40000 Ltr mobile water truck.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

We were deployed onto corra Rd onto burnt backed out ground at the same time yarloop burnt. After 1hr I told my sector commander that he was wasting our time, loaded up and moved to yarloop. I asked him to let control know.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

food was the only well managed part of the fire.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Both were crap.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

Worked with some grate Depaw crews at loque brook Dam.

Night shift Incident controller needs to be sacked. We had to bring the fuel truck to sutters lane to fuel the

- Texcom fuel truck was supplying  
Texcom, PAW, Nash and Moore Dozers, loaders..

\* IF we didn't find a ~~back~~ Rd  
around the Rd block at least 8  
machines would of stoped and  
harvey would possibly have been burnt  
Aswell.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number W'anoora Ya'loop

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Coop VBFB 7/1/16 to 17/1/16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

The Murray Shire beepers did not go off. A relative in Warcoona rang me & said when are you at midnight 7/1/16 thinking I was on the fire ground. Rang Warcoona Chief. Put sign on truck & went to relatives place when fire started.

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

1) I saw no one, just farmers fighting the fire on the northern flank Coronation road. The 2 of us helped when could. Went to break down & put 4 loads of water, stopped running fire. Went through the blackops & went to Vernon Piles property, saw no one from FEBS there or on way.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time

frame? YES  NO

Comments,

Saw no one until 3 days later at Bristol R, a sector commander got separated from his crew & didn't know how to get back to his fire trucks. Told him to ring Toadde.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

2) Valued - saved 3 houses, dairy, farm land. Stopped running fire. Left to own devices to save agricultural land.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Not using local knowledge put lives at risk. A lot saved by farmers - not coordinated, left to own devices. Could have done more if supported.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Extremely poorly managed - lack of coordination of resources. No use of local knowledge - Not responding to first call that fire in hills or if all effort (bombers) here may have reduced severity of fire.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

3) Not using local operators enough to put in breaks. Focus on houses which is good but left agricultural land to farmers which is catastrophic. Not letting locals return through fire breaks with supplies. Not letting communication between agencies.

When I first got to Coronation Rd (west) I and John Salerian at 12:30pm 7/1/16 & woke him up & said a huge fire was headed his way. He is a local farmer & knew nothing about. Later next day his farm was burnt out but the houses saved.

① us who came We fought the fire at the dairy, houses & burnt the creek.

② Was told by Warcona VBF B that if we hadn't saved Vern Pitters' houses/hay etc then Hamel would have ~~gone~~ gone up.  
Lack of local knowledge by those in charge jeopardised people.

③ Bushfires need to be managed by local volunteer BFB (m-change) assisted by other agencies.

Positive

Everyone on the ground are to be congratulated  
VBF B members fantastic. Public support excellent  
Well done to all

## Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number PHS 068 Waroona/Yarloop 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North Dandalup BFB 12-01-16(N/S), 13-01-16(N/S), 15-01-16(D/S).

Were you part of a Task Force Yes/No or out of Shire deployment Yes/No

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? Yes/No

Comments:

No issues.

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? Yes/No

Comments:

- Directions to Incident control (Waroona Football Club Oval) for an 18:00 start time no further instructions given.
- Lack of signage/direction and information regarding handing in second T card at Waroona Fire Station for tasking.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? Yes/No

Comments:

- Upon arrival and sourcing information to find out location of BFS control (Waroona Fire Station) Divisional Commander (D/S) had no briefing ready or knowledge of incoming N/S crews, we were told to have dinner.
- Briefing paperwork for N/S was sufficient with relevant information.
- It took 1hr50mins to be tasked out to the fire ground, by that time it was now dark and navigating our way around the fire ground was difficult.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the district and could you have been used in a more valued way? if so how

Minimal value throughout night patrolling with 6 appliances. If planning from D/S Divisional Commander was adequate and resourcing of appliances was correct, were needed it would have been more beneficial over a larger or concerning areas.

How would you rate your time? Yes/No

Comments:

- Minimal food at control for midnight breaks, otherwise sufficient.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors?  Yes/ No  
Comments:

- Divisional Commander (D/S [REDACTED] (not sure on spelling) either lacked interest or knowledge in role as planning/tasking for oncoming crews was substandard.
- No formal sector commander hand/overs completed, poor paperwork trail.
- Dfes lacked in passing on relevant information.
- Changing of sector commanders 3 to 4 times during a shift is inadequate.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative:

- Local knowledge needs to be utilised during incidents and managed accordingly.
- Hand/overs need to be completed during daylight hrs for maximum efficiency and safety.
- BFS personnel with relevant qualifications and experience need to be utilised within control and Incident Management Teams as too many BFS VOLUNTEERS are over looked.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number WARREN / LIARLOOP

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment COOLUP 10.0.16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES   
UNKNOWN

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

I WAS INFORMED THE DAY BEFORE.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. YES ON THE DAY I SPENT AT THE

INCIDENT

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

THERE SEEMED TO BE A LACK OF UNDERSTAND  
OF OVER ALL CONTROL, SECTOR COMMANDER  
DIDN'T SET GOALS PRIORITIES.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number WARCONA/YARLOOP FIRES

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment COOLUP - 4 DAY SHIFTS SPREAD OVER DURATION OF FIRE (7/11/16 FIRST SHIFT)

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments, CONTROL POINT LOCATION MOVED DURING SHIFT RESULTING IN SOME CONFUSION AT END OF SHIFT.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO  ON 2 OCCASSIONS WE WAITED FOR 2 HOURS

Comments, BEFORE BEING TASKED. SEVERAL CREWS ARRIVED AFTER US + WERE TASKED BEFORE US.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

WHEN DEPLOYED ON 12.2 I FEEL WE WERE UNDER-UTILISE WE WAITED 2 HOURS BEFORE BEING TASKED OUT AND ONLY FILLED 3 LIGHT TANKERS AND A 2.4 WE DID NOT NEED TO

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO  REFILL THE 12.2 FOR DURATION OF SHIFT

Comments, FOOD + DRINK WAS READILY AVAILABLE

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments ON ONE SHIFT WE HAD TO HAVE/HAND OVER 2 T-CARDS AT 2 LOCATIONS AT WARCONA OVAL.

WE HAD TO ARGUE AT END OF SHIFT TO GET ONE OF THE T-CARDS REMOVED

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

POOR COMMUNICATION / LEADERSHIP AMONGST THOSE IN CONTROL AT INCIDENT CONTROL POINT. DIVISION COMMANDER HAD POOR UNDERSTANDING OF CURRENT CONDITIONS ON FIRE GROUND. LACKED PLAN / VISION ON HOW TO TACKLE FIRE. NEED TO CONSIDER LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WHEN

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Warroona / Yerloop

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Coop - Thurs.

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident, were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

No - they not aware we on ground as T card was lost

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

- Did not know we on ground.  
- Sect commander would not answer radio he was red truck

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 1. ALZONA BUSHFIRE 2016.

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment COOLUP.

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

WAITING AROUND FOR 2-3 HRS WAITING TO BE TASKED IS NOT WHAT VOLUNTEERS NEED WE ARE ONLY FREE FOR A SHIFT AND DON'T WANT TO WASTE 2-3 HRS STANDING AROUND.  
In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

SECTOR COMMANDERS NEED TO BE AT LEAST LOCAL PERSONNEL -

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

INCIDENT CONTROL NEED TO HAVE A BODY WITH LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IN WITH THEM - PEOPLE FROM CITY ARE NO GOOD RUNNING INCIDENT IN THE COUNTRY AND BUSINESS - ASK LOCAL KNOWLEDGE YOU MIGHT JUST PREVENT FURTHER DAMAGE & SPREAD OF FIRE!

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number WAROONA FIRE  
Brigade Name and Date of Deployment COOLUP VBFB 7/1/16 - 17/1/16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments, YES!! Bluey confirmed crews required well in advance of turnout time and we then had "back to back" crews organised to assist with shift change. We were just never called out.

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

On both occasions arriving to incident control, we were made to wait approx 2 hrs before being deployed to our sector.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

We were used once on the fire ground, but I believe that the Coolup Brigade could have been used more effectively in the early days of the fire. We had crews ready to deploy throughout the incident.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Food / Drink etc was A++

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Peter Thurtle from N<sup>th</sup> Dandalup was an excellent SC and had great communication with crews.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

Communication was obviously lacking throughout the incident. We arrived for shifts and were told we shouldn't be there. We had trucks sent home while the fire was raging only an hour after arriving. I feel Coolup (and other Murray Shire Brigades) could have been better utilized considering the size of the incident. It could have stopped it getting so big.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Waroona Yarloop

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Coolup BFB 7/1/16 → 17/1/16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments, It seemed to take too long to get tasked to a sector as incident controllers took too long in working out where appliances needed to be sent.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. We could have been sent on the night of the 6/1/16 to help Waroona and Harvey brigades and had one unit from Coolup sent home 2 hours into night shift on 7/1/16 because wasn't supposed to be deployed.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments, Welfare was of a high standard

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments to long to be tasked at control sector commander were good

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

Listen to local knowledge and use the information. Locals might be volunteers but we know how to fight bush fires.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Waroona / Yarloop

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Coolup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,  
Kept changing minds, yes no yes no yes no

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,  
Again kept changing

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,  
sent out to sort grass near creek @ Yarloop. never did find it.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

NO

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,  
Finally improved.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments  
wanted to know where Coolup HT was, not had one for 3 yrs!!!

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

Treat your locals & walkies with way more respect.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 1. JH200NH

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Cookup *15/03/2017 HILK MITHIN (12/03/17)*

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. *TASKED TO PROP UP 2 OTHER UNITS WITH NO REASONING, UNABLE TO GET ON ORIGINALLY TASKED WITH ESCORT DUTIES BUT NOT CUMMULATED*

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

*NO COMMENTS WERE MADE AT END OF CALLS*

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number WAROONIA / YARLCOOP

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment COOLUP, 13<sup>TH</sup> / 16<sup>TH</sup> JAN 2016

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments, SECTOR COMMAND CHANGED 8+ TIMES WITHOUT NOTICE

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments, TOLD TO GO HERE, TOLD TO GO THERE, SEE HIM, HE'S NOT DOING THAT ROLL TODAY. WE LEFT COOLUP STATION @ 5:30 AM AND DID NOT GET TASKED TILL 7:30AM

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

NO, WE SPENT MORE TIME AWAITING FUTHER INSTRUCTION

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments SECTOR COMMAND CHANGED TOO MUCH

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

TOO MUCH TIME SPENT WAITING FOR INSTRUCTIONS FROM PEOPLE WHO DID NOT KNOW HOW TO INSTRUCT

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Waroona Yarloop

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment Codrup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments, we heard the planes before we were activated

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments, N/A

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

valuable

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments, no food or toilet on first day  
water bombers

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments lack of communication at the field  
+ also on DFES website

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

well done Ra Wheeler for the continued use of the private airfield

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number WARRONGA 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment WEST MORAY

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

LOOKED AFTER SECTOR AS INSTRUCTED

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

NO WELFARE FOR 9.5 HRS.

SANDWICHES ONLY

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

NO CONTACT WITH SECTOR COMMANDER FOR 6 HRS

LEFT TO MANAGE SECTOR WITH ONLY 1 LT

ONLY HAD LT TO TRUCK DOZER IN TIMES,

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

COMMUNICATION WITH SECTOR COMMANDER ONLY TOOK CONTROL AND SAUCE PROBLEMS

CONTROL HAD TO REASSURE LT FROM FIRE GROUND AS SECTOR COMMANDER NOT DOWN

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment West Murray 8-01-16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

*No, we spent alot of time standing around.*

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

*NO sector Commander for 6 1/2 hrs.*

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

*communication & information needed Better.*

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323 128 ~~323 128~~ w ANCORP 323 128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment WEST MURRAY 6-1-16 - 10-1-16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

NO CLEAR INSTRUCTION, JUST DRIVE DOWN ROAD TO  
FIND SECTOR COMMAND

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

6AM START, WITH ALL BRIEFING WITHIN AT 9:00 WILL HAVE  
MAPS

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

WAS GOOD WITHIN WE HAD ALL INFO

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

MEALS JUST DROPPED ON GROUND NO COOL BOX'S

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

LACK ON INFO PASSED UP AND DOWN

SECTORS WORKED ON ONE

3 SECTORS COMMAND

IN 3 HOURS

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment WEST MURRAY

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments, TOLD TO DRIVE TO / GIVEN DIRECTIONS TO SECTOR & TOLD TO FIND SECTOR COMMANDER.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments, NO COMMUNICATIONS WITH SECTOR COMMANDER  
TAKEN APPROX 2hrs AFTER ARRIVING IN SECTOR

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. YES

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments COMMUNICATION ISSUES ACROSS SECTOR & FROM SECTOR BACK TO INCIDENT CONTROL

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

NEEDED MAP OF AREA/SECTOR  
COMMUNICATION NEEDS IMPROVING,  
GOOD USE OF WATER TANKERS - AMBLE SUPPLY OF WATER  
GOOD CATERING,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number VALCOOP / NARCONIA 32828

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment WEST MURRAY FRIDAY NIGHT 15-1-16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

IT WAS WIND DOWN SO JUST PATROLLING AND BLACKING OUT ALL IMPORTANT STUFF STILL.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

HAVING TO BECK IN TWO PLACES, DOESN'T THE LEFT HAND TALK TO THE RIGHT HAND.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

SEE ABOVE, COMMS BUT THATS NORMAL FOR THAT AREA.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

CATERING WAS FANTASTIC.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number PHS 068 Waroona/Yarloop 323 128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North Doodlakine VBFS Wed 13<sup>th</sup> - 2016 - JCM

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. Yes, was a very valuable time on the fire ground as we spent the whole shift focusing on mop up at a residents house, who hadn't slept in several days due to unforeseen mop up.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments, Meals were great, very filling

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments little communication from central point waroona, otherwise Sector NOV was talking a lot!!! and waroona great all together

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number MARVEY VALDONNA

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment NORTH MANARUA 3/10/16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments, CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS FROM NORTH MANARUA BRIGADE BUT NO CLEAR DIRECTION FROM SECTOR COMMANDER  
DIRECTIONS

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments, NO VLO'S TO HELP.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. YES AS SECTOR COMMANDER WAS VERY CONFUSED ON SITUATION

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments, FOOD QUALITY WAS VERY POOR.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments THAT ROAD WAS CLOSED

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

IF I HAD BEEN GIVEN MORE INFORMATION AND TASKS TO DO I WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE USEFUL TO THE INCIDENT  
AND ALSO MORE INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number WARRONA 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment NTM DANDALUP

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments, We were told to just get down there and report to command.

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

~~SPRINKLER~~ Sealer Commander and crews should not charge out at some time.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North Dandalup

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments, sat around for 1 hour before other crews turned up for chaffeeve, tasked out to assess a flare up. Returned back to control after an 1/2 to reevaluate situation ~~and~~ as arrived back at 10:30 & wasn't sent out to do anything till 12:30.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

As Above  
Com's was really Bad.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Winton 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment North district

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

Sat at control point for 1 hour

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number 323 128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment NORTH DANDALUP BEB 3.4 13/1/16.

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,  
NIL

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,  
HANDLED IN T-CARD AND THEN HAD TO FILL IN ANOTHER ONE FOR D.C

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO  ON ARRIVAL.

Comments, SECTOR COMMANDERS WERE CHOSEN FROM IN COMING CREWS. NO QUAYS WERE ASK FOR, NO LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, NO SECTOR SITREP/ END OF SHIFT REPORTS ISSUED.

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how. SENT TO SECURE AROUND FARMER'S HOUSE - LOADER AVAILABLE UNTIL MIDNIGHT - ASBESTOS FOUND ON SITE IN BUSHES DURING MOP-UP.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments, LOOKED AFTER BY SECTOR COMMANDER M. SIMPSON. GENERAL WELFARE EXCELLENT.

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments TOO MANY UNBURNT POCKETS LEFT UNATTENDED AND BREAKING OUT.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

\* NO BUSAFIRE V.L.O'S PRESENT TO SUPPORT VOWLIES \*  
\* DFES STAFF STANDING VOWLIES DOWN SO THEY COULD GET OVERTIME - THIS HAS TO STOP. \*  
\* LACK OF KNOWLEDGE BY CAREER FIRE FIGHTERS IN BUSAFIRE + ASSET PROTECTION IN BUSAFIRE. \*

# Post Incident Questionnaire.

Incident Name or Number, 323128

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment, COOLUP Peter Zahra

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

no value whats so ever should have been called out 4 or 5 days ago when we were needed

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

They didnt know what we were to do  
it told us we were the only unit (there were  
3 other units there that were told the same)  
we had to sign on to two different controls

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

at warrenq each were working independant o  
the other group  
the food was good.

# Post Incident Questionnaire

Incident Name or Number Warracoola - Wed Night (1st day of fire)

Brigade Name and Date of Deployment West Murrumbidgee Light Tanker 6/1/16

Were you part of a Task Force (out of region) YES  or out of Shire deployment (LG assistance within region) YES

Were you given enough lead time before deployment? YES  NO

Comments,

Were you given clear instructions about deployment, i.e. Control point location, Task Force meeting point, duration of deployment, operating channel, task force leader and contact phone number? YES  NO

Comments,

On arrival at incident were you and your crews given enough information and tasked out to work in a reasonable time frame? YES  NO

Comments,

In your opinion how was your time at the incident spent, were you of value to the outcome or could you have been used in a more valued way? If so how.

- 1st - check and report on fire in an area.
- 2 - Spot fire control.
- 3 - later asset protection with a <sup>N.D. Preston</sup> 3/4, 2/4.
- 4 - Assist mop up.

Did you have any issues with welfare? YES  NO

Comments,

This was a fire front and we protected a large asset.

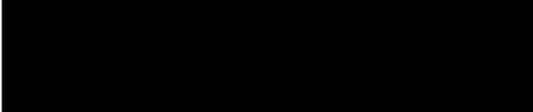
Any issues with the management of incident, either from Control point or Sectors? YES  NO

Comments

Communications. Went out early morning. Phones in and out. WARRACOLLA Lt - mobile number given and was a valuable link to communicate with control and to our sector leader.

Any further comments of incident either positive or negative,

U



26/2/2016

Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6 Dumas House  
2 Havelock st  
West Perth

Dear Sir,

I am concerned about the saving of historical artifacts and in particular when these such items could have been preserved by thoughtful selection of fire sprinklers, here in this case I'm talking about a museum and the contents were priceless.

However I do wish to see a body appointed that has the authority to classify when and where fire sprinkler protection must be provided on government historical assets.

I would be pleased to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely





9 MAR 2017

Dear Mr Francis.

My name is [REDACTED] I am the captain of the Wellington Mills volunteer bush fire brigade, which I have been a member of for 25 years. I am writing this as an individual sanctioned by no one, because I feel that some of my recent experiences on the fire ground could have been better. Everyone at a fire is there to offer their time, skills, wellbeing, and do the best they can. A bushfire has the potential to be a nasty place to be and anything that shortens it, makes it easier and safer is worth a look. The business of fire fighting has come a long way but like so many things has become a beast that is a collection of add to's and now might be the time for a fresh painting on a new canvas. I think it is time to stand back, look at what service needs to be provided and what it has to accomplish, because it seems quite obvious to the likes of me that there is real room for improvement.

A bushfire at the moment is something that is owned by DFES, or by DPAW, or by the shire, by the volunteers, but not by everyone, so the job of fighting it becomes very disjointed and less effective the more complex it gets. There needs to be one team with the skill, experience and professionalism at the helm. They need to know everything and with that they need the technology to do so. Every person and every piece of equipment on that fire ground should be represented by an icon on a big screen, so that resources can be monitored in real time to a fire in real time. All the resources should be under their control and at their disposal. I'm sure that with GPS and technology this is do-able. This sort of stuff costs a lot of money but I believe that workers and volunteers who put their lives on the line probably have as much if not more cred than foreshore developments and football stadiums. Recently I spent 3 days at the Waroona fire supported by huge amounts of resources. Up to 50% of my time was spent unproductively. For a lot of the time the management had no idea who was where. As a result, my crew and I spent a lot of time in transit, only to be moved on once we arrived because of over resourcing. In the meantime other locations were wanting. For example, having arrived at

Brunswick, we had a 45 minute wait for our assignment, drove to the assigned part of Forrest Highway in convoy, waited another half hour only to find that we should've been at the Southwest Highway. Start the convoy rolling again, stop in the middle of nowhere, waited for more instructions, then waited another half hour before heading onto Cookernup where 6 trucks were missioned to control one street that was already extinguished. Spent three hours looking for something that was actually on fire, then suddenly we are one of only two units in all of Cookernup and doing it hard. There were sufficient resources to manage the fire but technology was lacking in compiling the big picture of where the equipment and the fire were in real time. Running the whole thing is a big job and the logistics are monumental.

Bushfires are here for the long run, and will only get bigger and more dangerous as the weather evolves in their favour. Now is the time to move, not in hind sight as seems to be the norm in this sort of policy making. A good time to act is now and time to start a new or next time the numbers count will make really big headlines.

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1 March 2016



Yes I would wish to make an orally present my submission at the public or private hearing.

Dear Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM

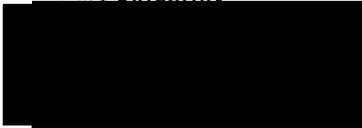
My name is [redacted] and I live at [redacted] in Waroona . I have lived here for about 20 years and I have seen three bush fires in my area. The first one they got it out straight away because everyone helped to get it out there was bureaucratic (red tape) to stop people from fighting it and doing what they have to do to get it out .

But now it has all changed it is hard to put something out if you are not allowed to help and you might get a fine or put in jail . Last year, 2015 was an eye opener firstly the warning came to late we got out of there took our children , animals and some photos, documents and a few clothes . We didn't know where to go or we didn't have enough information to let us know what was going on . We evacuated at the Harvey Recreation Centre.

This year 2016 was another eye opener again but it was worse when the fire was just a paddock away from our house. We had no choice we had to say and defend the warning came too late and the roads were blocked from people having a look.

The things that can change is they can fight the fire before it is too hard to contain, stop it when there is no wind ,let everybody help to fight the fires such as farmers ,people with bulldozers or any other heavy machinery cut the red tape so they can get the fire out not let it get out off control and maybe have training days for the people who live in a bush areas to be prepared in case it happens again. When there is a fire the warning should go out when it is around the area not when the fire is at your doorstep.

Yours Sincerely



To: waroonaenquiry@semc.wa.gov.au  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Subject: submission to enquiry.  
Date: 3-3-16

My name is [REDACTED] I worked as a volunteer at the Pinjarra Evacuation centre from Day 1 to close of centre. My comments and observations are gathered from this time and past experiences on the land.

(1)b. Did DPAW tell DFES that this fire had been allowed to leave the hills ?

(c) Why was the fire at Nanga Brook on Tues 5th Jan ignored ? Common sense knows that a small fire will become a big fire especially on the scarp in the forecast weather conditions.

(d) Very obvious that incident controllers out numbered fire fighters, why weren't local Volunteer Bushfire fighters used ? Why weren't the S.E.S used to manage road blocks and escort genuine vehicles in and out of fire zone ?

Did the interstate F/fighters actually DO any fire fighting ? If it was known at the Waroona Community meeting at 11:30am Wed " that Yarloop is in trouble "

why wasn't there a concentrated effort to protect that community? At the very least, provide them with water !!

(e) The stupid placement of road blocks caused huge problems. This lack of common sense caused people to break the law, swimming rivers, crossing private land etc... preventing fuel tankers to fuel water bomber planes at the Coolup airstrip and supply diesel to Placid Ark roadhouse for all the generators in use. They also prevented Staff from working at the same roadhouse.

Red Fire trucks should not be sent out to bushfires as they are only allowed to fight fires from, and along, THE ROAD. Bush fires are in the bush !!! But the Red Fire trucks could have protected Yarloop, why didn't they ?? That was on the road.

(g) (i) A list or log of all evacuated people from the fire areas was needed, especially from Yarloop. If these people were given some sort of emergency ID card on the day, no matter how make-shift, it would have been a great help to these traumatised people who had to keep repeating their story over and over.

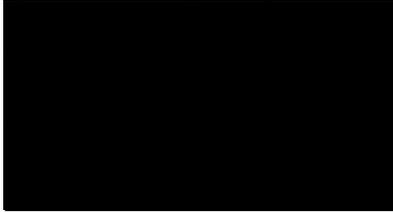
(ii) Communications to people trapped in fire, there were none!!!

(iii) Welfare support: The late appearance of a Centre-link official to the Evac centre and the reason for this was astonishing!! They should have been there from Day 1, the same goes for Legal Aid. By the time these reps arrived, people had dispersed far and wide, to deal with the trauma on their own.

(h) Due to some bungle with the Professional 'roo shooters, many burnt and injured wildlife were still staggering around one month after the fires.

Hope the above information will be of some use and I sincerely hope this enquiry will be PUBLIC and OPEN to address the many issues and mistakes made during these fires that cost 2 people their lives and

*James Cooper*



Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6 Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH  
Western Australia 6005

2 March 20156

Dear Sirs.

I would like to make some comments for the Yarloop Inquiry.

Firstly I will state that I have no reasons for writing other than a frustration in my thinking of how bush fires are fought. I don't live in the bush, nor have any relations with possible suppliers of products that may benefit from my suggestions. The only think that I have is a weekly reminder as I go to fly at Cunderdin as to what could be.

At Cunderdin there is a Neptune aircraft parked, that was designed to be a water bomber that I believe CASA did not allow to fly in that configuration.

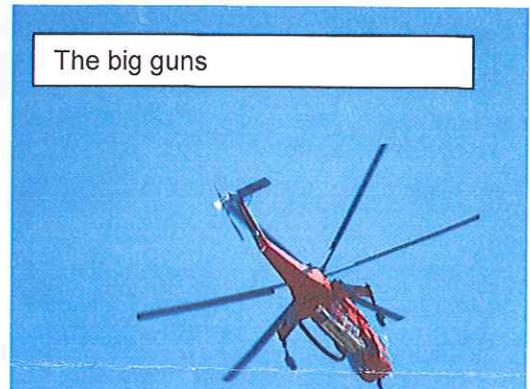


When I passed a bush fire the other week near to the Lakes at Mundaring I saw a considerable number of fire engines leaving Perth to put out the fire. In addition there was a small helicopter doing its water bombing job. However within three hours the fire starting it was reported to be out of control already. I think this is quite typical of the Australian bush fire.

What strikes me is that when the fire is small the relatively small firefighting units come to put it out. However the fires within a very short time are dwarfing the fire engines and water bombing aircraft. On the occasions when the fires get very large the big guns are bought in from over East to fight the fire, but these units are again dwarfed by the fire.

So my basic understanding of how the fire is fought is that it is always fought with systems that are too small to do the job. What we should do is, as soon as the fire starts put it out with maximum effort.

There are large water bombers, like the Neptune, that if ready could go in and bomb the small fire and put it out before it became catastrophic. Above that I would think that perhaps three water bombers should be available to do the job. They could either lay three lines of water in a triangle around the fire, to enclose it. Or alternatively with three parallel lines. The first downwind to wet the bush to prevent it burning from embers that may blow down wind. Then two other lines on the downwind edge



The big guns



then over the centre of the fire. I would have thought that the fire could be put out by putting huge volumes of water and fire retardant on it.

The big problem is where the aircraft would be operated. You could consider Jandakot or Perth. But I see that the big problem would be who would fly such aircraft. On the basis that pilots would need to be scrambled quickly, or put in the air on catastrophic days before fires even start, to loiter over the hills. Pilots with the skill to fly large aircraft would be working with their day to day jobs could be out of house having flown within say the last 8 hours. My suggestion that they would be operated by the RAAF and located at Pearce. I would have thought that there would be plenty of skilled pilots being able to fly such aircraft as modified Herculeses.

Of course the cost would have to be bought into consideration. I have no idea of the cost of such aircraft. I also have no idea of the cost of damage at fires like Yarloop. But what is clear is that if a fire is allowed to get out of control the costs to the community are horrendous. I would also have thought that the large bombers could be made from outdated aircraft for current rolls, like Herculeses aircraft.

Another thing to consider is that should the state government put such expensive aircraft into service, would it be reasonable to charge insurance companies some of the costs, as they will probably be the greatest beneficiary, other than the residents.

I thank you for reading this letter and should you wish to talk to me in greater detail I would of course be welcome to give you ideas that are not the norm.

Regards

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

29 February 2016

Waroona Bushfire Special Enquiry  
Level 6 Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Ferguson

**RE: WAROONA BUSHFIRE SPECIAL ENQUIRY**

**Preamble**

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a Communication Systems Officer (CSO) in the DFES Communication Centre at the Emergency Services Complex at Cockburn on B Platoon. I have filled the role of CSO since 2009 and whilst definitely not one of the most experienced CSOs in the communication centre I have been on shift when some of the larger, campaign incidents (Parkerville, Bullsbrook, Roleystone) have occurred. Prior to commencing my role as a CSO I was based at the DFES Academy working in the Commercial Training and Career Training Units.

During the Waroona incident B platoon was on shift for the following period and I was working in the communication centre:

4 January 2016 day shift  
5 January 2016 day shift  
6 January 2016 night shift  
7 January 2016 night shift

I provide my submission in the public forum as to my knowledge the Communication Centre personnel will not be interviewed as part of the enquiry. Furthermore the CSO's have not been encouraged to provide feedback in any capacity as part of the enquiry. In previous enquiries, investigations, post incident analysis and reviews, feedback and input has not been sought from CSO's. It is disappointing, as a stakeholder of the campaign incidents that CSO's are not actively encouraged or invited to participate in any form of incident review.

Furthermore I provide this feedback with a positive overtone. It is my belief that any review is positive and allows all participants to provide feedback and promotes growth and learning within individuals and stakeholders alike.

I have provided feedback on some elements of the terms of reference, where I believe that the feedback and comment that I have to offer is relevant.

**The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance.**

#### FCAD & WEBEOC

From a CSO perspective the effectiveness of incident management is compromised as DFES currently uses both FCAD and WEBEOC programs as part of the management of an incident.

CSO's do not have access/log in to WEBEOC.

FCAD and WEBEOC are not compatible.

Any informative messages, situation reports, requests for resources etc that are recorded on WEBEOC are not able to be viewed or accessed by CSOs in the communication centre.

During incidents and particularly in the regions, situation reports, requests for alerts and media releases etc are recorded on WEBEOC. On several occasions the communications centre has contacted the IC/Regional Operational Centre for a situation report to be advised that "the information is on WEBEOC".

When both FCAD and WEBEOC programs are used in the management of incidents, because the communications centre does not have access to WEBEOC the communications centre loses a large degree of incident/situational awareness.

The resources and appliances attached to the incident using FCAD is inaccurate. Regularly resources are mobilised at a local level and this information is not communicated to the communications centre and subsequently not recorded on the FCAD incident. Furthermore during campaign incidents where the Metropolitan Operation Centre (MOC) and State Operational Centre (SOC) have been stood up and have been involved in sourcing relief crews for the incident, regularly these relief crews are sourced from brigades, groups, units (B/G/Us) and the communications centre are not informed of these B/G/Us mobilisation to the incident.

In addition, regularly resources from B/G/Us are not mobilised using the correct communication medium (ie. Group call, pagers, SMS) when this task is undertaken by the MOC/SOC.

*On several occasions my colleagues and I have spoken with superiors regarding the benefits of using a CSO in the MOC/SOC to accurately record the resources attached to an incident and ensure that the B/G/Us are mobilised using the correct communication medium.*

*In addition, the CSO could be provided a WEBEOC login and ensure that any requests, situation reports, relevant information recorded on WEBEOC is subsequently also captured on FCAD.*

**The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors.**

From my experience I believe that the effectiveness of the public messaging and subsequent timeliness of the warnings issued can be improved. I believe that one of the main contributing factors to the effectiveness of the public messaging is due to the communication platforms that are used to distribute this information.

Social Media

DFES do not have a Facebook platform to effectively communicate information to the community. It is my perception that generally the agencies use of social media platform is poor. Through my own social media viewing (specifically facebook) I am aware that many other agencies (Police, CFS, RFS, MFB etc) use social media extensively

- to distribute information relating to incidents including alerts and warnings
- total fire bans and prohibited burning periods
- to promote their agency
- to promote the work they are doing in the community
- report on commendations awarded to personnel
- advertise media campaigns
- graduations
- fundraising opportunities or events of Brigades, Groups, Units

The extensive use of their social media platform ensure that the public are well aware of the positive work that they are doing in the community, the developments and progression as an agency and commendations promotes the agency in a positive environment, whilst also using the platform as a way of communicating specific operational incident information and weather events.

It is my perception that currently DFES does not use social media effectively or to its full capacity to communicate public messaging, alerts or emergency warnings. Social media is one of the main forms of communication for many generations, it is an efficient and timely communication medium, can be reviewed and revised in a timely manner to accurately reflect the status of an incident. Furthermore for travellers/passers-by who may not be familiar with their surroundings, the communication mediums currently used to communicate incident information, sources of public information etc through information sharing on Facebook and other social media forums can assist them gain situational awareness of incidents in the locality.

Refer to the insert below which has been copied directly from the DFES website:

### **Other sources of information**

It is important to remember that Emergency Alert is just one way of receiving information during an emergency. Other ways you can stay informed include:

- visiting the DFES website
- calling the DFES information line on 13 DFES (13 3337)
- listening to ABC radio, 6PR and other media news bulletins
- following DFES on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/dfes\\_wa](http://www.twitter.com/dfes_wa)

It is my perception that the DFES twitter use is minimal and ineffective.

Furthermore advising the community members to listen to the ABC radio, 6PR and other media news bulletins is misleading as the Agency is relying on these media outlets to provide the information in a timely manner, regularly and to the required target audience. It is my perception that it is our Agencies responsibility to communicate this information to the community, rather than delegate this responsibility to privately owned organisations.

DFES does not have a smartphone application and the agencies lack of development in technology in this area is concerning. The statement below has been copied directly from the DFES website.

### **Does DFES have a smart phone app?**

While DFES does not have a smart phone app, DFES' website is smart phone friendly and you can add the site ([www.dfes.wa.gov.au/alerts](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/alerts)) to the home screen of your smart phone, which will give you easy access to the alerts and warnings alongside your apps. Check your phone's instructions for how to do this.

The current communication mediums used to communicate incident information/warnings/alerts is too laborious and cumbersome and does not provide the end user with timely accurate incident information. Currently DFES alerts provide a visual perspective by placing an 'icon' on the town/city where the incident is located. The reality is that the incident may encompass surrounding areas which is not accurately reflected on the current media alerts.

In addition it is my perception that DFES regularly fails to meet the timelines for the issuing of the relevant information/alerts/warnings. This is particularly relevant once the initial information/alerts/warnings has been issued, regularly the follow up information is not issued within the timelines promoted on our website (refer below).

### **For a bushfire the national warning system is:**

- An **Advice** is issued at 11 am and 4 pm unless the situation changes.
- A **Watch and Act** is issued every two hours unless the situation changes.
- An **Emergency Warning** is issued every hour unless the situation changes.
- An **All Clear** is issued once when the threat has passed.

### Telephone Warning System (TWS)

When a telephone warning system (TWS) is issued by the State Situation and Analysis Officer (SAO) regularly the communications centre are not informed of the TWS being issued or the message that has been issued. Therefore when recipients who either are unable to interpret the message, miss the call etc and subsequently call 000/132500 to seek clarification or validation of the message the CSOs are not in a position to provide this information to the callers. Furthermore it would be beneficial if the communications centre could be provided with a visual representation of the area that the TWS was issued too.

## Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by fire:

- I. Evacuation procedures
- II. Communications with the community over the course of the fire
- III. Provision of welfare support
- IV. Management of people seeking to return to their properties, and

## Livestock and companion animal management and welfare issues

### Evacuation Procedures

When alerts/warnings are issued recommending the public evacuate their location, information needs to be provided on the issued warning/alert on the safest routes, road closures and evacuation centres that are available to the general public. For example purposes only (Refer to Picture 1 at the end of this document ) is a copy of a Bushfire Emergency Warning issued for an incident located in the Shire of Dardanup. Throughout the alert the tone of the language promotes the seriousness of the incident by the use of statements including:

*You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. There is a threat to lives and homes.*

*Do not wait and see, leaving at the last minute is deadly.*

However, when reviewing the alert for direction, the following information is provided in support of the above statements

*Safer Place – Your safest option may be to visit family and friends who live away from the area.*

*Road Closures – Avoid the area and be aware of fire and other emergency services personnel working on site. Some roads may be closed. Road information may also be available from Main Roads WA by calling 138 138 or visiting [www.mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au).*

Effectively the Emergency Warning has advised the community that it is not safe for them to be in the affected area, that there is a threat to property and lives but has provided the community with no information on the routes that they should use to leave the area, road closures or an evacuation point (or centre).

The negative language with the use of “may” and “some” combined with the lack of information and ambiguity of the information provided on the emergency warning, could create confusion in the community. Rather the emergency warning should provide clear, concise and specific information to the community on road closures, evacuation routes and safe places that are available to them.

### Communications with the community over the course of the fire

Communications with the community over the course of the fire need to be regular, consistent, clear and concise.

Watch and Act information probably needs to be issued more regularly than every two hours.

When communications with the general public are conducted on a personal level, through community forums and media interviews, press conferences etc, I believe that consistency is important. That is, that the agency is consistently represented by a person or a small pool of people who are communicating a consistent message. Similarly it is important that the people representing the agency at these forums/interviews have a 'presence' so that the public perception of the agency will be one of confidence.

### Provision of Welfare Support

Any requirement for welfare support needs to be identified early in the incident, not as an afterthought and have a clear and concise plan on how this will be provided.

Too often, this is random, lacks structure and is communicated poorly.

## Summary

In summary, I believe that communication, consistency and structure is the key. Effective, clear and concise communication with the community.

During the summer period I have watched media interviews from other states, where they are expecting a high fire danger index (FDI), high fire danger threat and the person representing their agency has openly communicated that if a fire starts on this day, there is every chance that:

- The weather conditions/weather element experienced will make fire fighting challenging in any capacity.
- It will take sometime to contain or control any fire(s).
- The fire(s) will probably be resource intensive and prolonged.
- There will be many agencies (Parks & Wildlife, CFS/RFS and career fire fighters) working together to achieve a favourable outcome.
- They have pre-positioned aircraft and identified locations.
- They will keep the affected communities and public informed at all times.
- The public need to play there part and be vigilant report fires as soon as they see them.
- The public should stay abreast and informed throughout the day through the range of media platforms that are used by the agency.

This information is not negative, but is real. It tells the community that the conditions will be challenging, resource intensive, that they should remain alert and vigilant and be familiar with their surroundings and potential hazards.

This is a consistent message that is delivered by fire agencies in the Eastern States. They communicate this message to the community consistently through a range of media platforms that effectively captures a wide audience.

Furthermore I believe that a clear, identified structure of the fire agency (however that is formed) needs to be put in place. Clear reporting lines, areas of responsibility, collaboration and cooperation. Identifying land tenure and subsequently which agency, B/G/U is responsible or is to manage the incident once the fire has started, what resources have been mobilised and subsequently trying to form or identify a structure, incident controller and the agency that they represent further delays the formation of an incident structure that provides clear reporting lines, areas of responsibility and collaboration between agencies. Similarly during campaign incidents, responsibility of the incident is often transferred or delegated between agencies, which then results in changes of the incident management structure, resource allocation etc creating further confusion.

Since the Woorloo/Yarloop incident I have read various media reports with interest, including interviews with a range of stakeholders, community members, politicians and associations. I am concerned and it is my perception that some of these individuals and organisations appear to have a self serving agenda.

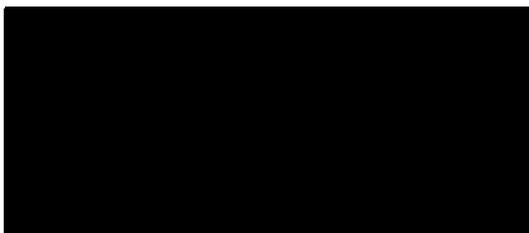
Whilst I support that every organisation and individual, even myself has the right to an opinion, it is my perception that some of the information contained in interviews and media releases is inflammatory and not constructive or relevant. That is, they are part of the problem, not the solution.

Furthermore the consistent 'blame game' that is often played out by agencies/associations and individuals alike in the public arena gives the community absolutely no confidence that any of those representatives have ability to work together to achieve a favourable outcome. I am sure that at times individuals/agencies and associations believe that this denigration promotes one over the other. As both a community member and an employee of an emergency services agency this behaviour further erodes the little confidence that the community has in any of the individuals/agencies and associations to effectively work together to achieve a favourable outcome for the community.

From my experience, the general public, the other agencies that I speak to don't actually care what colour the fire truck is, where it comes from, is it crewed by career or volunteer fire fighters. They only care if it has water on board and can the crew work to extinguish the fire. Similarly, the callers are not interested in the land tenure, just that it could pose a threat to them or their property.

Mr Ferguson, I appreciate that you will receive submissions from individuals, associations and organisations that have a much greater level of experience and knowledge to draw from when providing feedback and comment to the enquiry. I appreciate the opportunity to provide my very limited feedback to the enquiry in the hope that in some small way it may contribute to the growth and collaboration of individuals, associations and agencies alike as we work towards serving the community to the best of our ability.

Kind Regards



enc.

PICTURE 1

**From:** DFES Media and Corporate Communications (Lou McGown)  
<noreply@dfes.wa.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, 22 February 2016 1:53 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING Dardanup West in the Shire of Dardanup

This is an emergency broadcast  
from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.  
It is essential that the words are not changed.

Standard Emergency Warning Signal to be sounded  
before broadcasting the following.

Time of issue: 1.55pm

Date of issue: 22 February 2016

### **Bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING Dardanup West in the Shire of Dardanup**

#### **ALERT LEVEL:**

A bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING has been issued for people in an area bounded by Kentucky Drive, Padbury Road and Garvey Road in Dardanup West in the Shire of Dardanup

- You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. There is a threat to lives and homes.
- It is burning towards Padbury Road.

#### **BUSHFIRE BEHAVIOUR:**

- The bushfire is moving slowly in an easterly direction.
- It is out of control and unpredictable.
- Burning embers are likely to be blown around your home. Spot fires are starting up to 100 metres ahead of the fire.

#### **WHAT TO DO:**

- If the way is clear, leave now for a safer place.
- Do not wait and see, leaving at the last minute is deadly.
- There is ember attack ahead of the fire, so close all doors and windows, and turn off evaporative air conditioners, but keep water running through the system if possible.
- If your plan is to stay and actively defend, do not rely on mains water pressure as it may be affected. If you have access to a water tank and plan to defend your home, start patrolling with your hose and put out spot fires.
- If you cannot leave, you need to get ready to shelter in your home and actively defend it.
- If you are not at home, it is too dangerous now to return.

#### **SAFER PLACE:**

- Your safest option may be to visit family or friends who live away from the area.

#### ALERT LEVEL:

**A bushfire WATCH AND ACT has been issued for people in an area bounded by Boyanup-Picton Road, South Western Highway, Dardanup Road and Wallrodt Crescent in Dardanup West and Picton areas in the Shire of Dardanup.**

There is a possible threat to lives and homes as a fire is approaching the area and conditions are changing.

- You need to leave or get ready to actively defend.

#### WHAT TO DO:

- If you are not prepared or you plan to leave, leave now if the way is clear.
- If you are well prepared and plan to actively defend your home, make final preparations now.
- If you are not at home, do not try to return as conditions in the area could be very dangerous.

#### ROAD CLOSURES:

Avoid the area and be aware of fire and other emergency services personnel working on site.

Some roads may be closed.

Road information may also be available from Main Roads WA by calling 138 138 or visiting [www.mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au)

#### WHAT FIREFIGHTERS ARE DOING:

- Firefighters are on the scene actively fighting the fire.
- Aerial support has been sent to assist ground crews.

#### EXTRA INFORMATION:

- The fire was reported at 12.50pm today
- The cause of the fire is unknown
- The Shire of Dardanup is managing the fire.

#### KEEP UP TO DATE:

Visit [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), call 13 DFES (13 3337), follow DFES on Twitter @dfes\_wa, listen to ABC local radio, or news bulletins.

**Updates will be provided every hour unless the situation changes.**

END

**Media contact: DFES Media and Corporate Communications on 9225 5955.**

- Background - I rent [REDACTED] in Yarloop from Alcoa and have lived on the property for c. 10 years. The house is c. 0.5km West of the town of Yarloop. Almost the entire property was burnt out in the fire, including almost all paddocks, fences and a shed, although the house was saved despite the fire burning all around.
- I lost access to the DFES website at c. 3pm on the day of the fire when I lost power and land line access.
- Telstra mobile services were intermittent during the day and night of the fire, as they have been since Telstra 'upgraded' mobile services to 4G.
- I never received an SMS notification about the Yarloop fire, although did receive one in the subsequent days for Harvey.
- On the night of the fire (Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January) I intended to stay and protect the house.
- I thought that the fire danger had died down - because the helicopters seemed to have stopped dropping water and the smoke and ash in the air died down.
- To my knowledge, there was no back burning or clearing undertaken on the day of the fire to protect Yarloop.
- Given that the c. 50km/hour winds were consistently forecast in a direction which would push the fire towards the town of Yarloop and west to the coast, why was Yarloop not even mentioned on the DFES website until it was already on fire? The town must surely have been indefensible given the lack of back burning and clearing, strength and direction of wind and fuel load in the area? (Even though I had lost power my children were monitoring around the clock across time zones).
- At approx 8pm while sitting at the kitchen table having something to eat there was a very strong gust or blast of wind. I looked down through the house and saw a red glow which seemed pretty close.
- I went out to see the fire approaching very fast so I opened the gates to let the cattle out and then put the dog in the car and drove to the corner of Wickham Rd and Clifton Rd and watched the fire as it burned around the house.
- The fire then started behind the pub onto a block owned by Alcoa and leased to a farmer there was a very high fuel load and then the fire really picked up momentum.

- When the fire got to Wickham road it could possibly been stopped from going south and west. All through this a lot of fire units went up and down Clifton road and one never stopped to see if we were ok.
- I came back to the farm at about 12.30am and doused smouldering trees around the house then I found the stockyards burning and the sleepers under the fuel tanks smouldering.
- I then went to Brockman and Clifton Roads to find a fire unit. I got one and they came help me but there was some discussion on whether they would put the above fires out as they said that they had to conserve water. However they took pity on me and put the said fires out. This was about 6am they were the only fire unit that I saw.
- On the morning of the 8th we had no stock water, no fences and no water fittings (as they were destroyed in the big shed that had burned down completely). We had to get fencing material water fittings and petrol to keep our generators going.
- The road blocks following the fire (outside of the town of Yarloop) seemed excessive and unnecessary given there was nothing left to burn. There was no compromise or regard for the welfare of livestock or people in the area.
- I am 74 years old and was on the property on your own. Despite this my son was turned away from the area when he travelled from Perth to provide assistance on Monday 11th January. He was only allowed access on Tuesday 12th January following extensive phone negotiations. There was no immediate danger in the area as the fire had passed through on the Thursday evening. (If anything it was beneficial to have people there to monitor hot spots).
- The road blockages made no allowance for the fact that farmers had livestock which needed to be taken care of, let alone the 'people welfare' aspects for farmers in the area. There doesn't seem to have been any consideration given to the needs of livestock and farmers during this period. On my property the water pipes had burnt out and I needed to restore that to provide water for cattle as soon as possible given the excessive temperatures during that period. I also had to obtain feed, gather cattle who had fled when let out to avoid the fire, restore some emergency fencing, treat any who had been burnt or suffered from the smoke, connect the generator to the house to provide power for fridges, buy food etc given that power was out for almost 3 weeks.
- I was repeatedly stopped when trying to get into Waroona to get emergency supplies in or der to achieve these things and forced to break the law and drive through roadblocks. One of my neighbours, an 80 year old woman, was also prevented from using the roads and forced to drive cross country over rough paddocks and ditches in order to be able to get to and from her own property.

- Further one of my daughters attempted to drive down on Friday 15th January and was also turned away (cnr Johnson Road and Forrest Hwy) although allowed throw when she persisted. The fire was nowhere to be seen at this point.

To all concerned and to those responsible for change

11 March 2016

*The Essential Capability Enhancement Required By Fire Agencies in Australia*

In any fight, it is crucial that the capability of our own fighters be enhanced with the "best" unfair advantage that is suited to our unique and flammable Australian theatre.

In the fight against Australian Firestorm having the best fire suppression ability is the essential capability enhancement required by Fire Agencies in Australia. The "best" fire suppression product for Australia satisfies the following Valid Selection Criteria (VSC):

- a) *The efficient suppression of live Australian Firestorms*
- b) *Cost effectiveness to purchase, to handle, to store, to prepare, and to deploy*
- c) *Minimum acceptable effects that may exacerbate the occurrence of future fires*
- d) *Minimum acceptable danger to the long-term health, and, occupational health and safety of our fire fighters and of the Australian community, and*
- e) *Minimum acceptable risk to the Australian Ecosystem (water, soil, flora and fauna and therefore to our Biodiversity).*

Fire Agencies in Australia recommend only those fire suppression products "approved" by the United States Department of Agriculture and Forest Service, the USDAFS. Disastrously the laboratory based USDAFS procedures do not and cannot in any way qualify fire suppression products for Australian Firestorms as stipulated by the VSC above. The USDAFS' approval of fire suppression products is therefore irrelevant to our fight against Australian Firestorms.

Fifteen years have passed since communications on this subject began with FESA (now DFES) leadership in Perth, Western Australia. Concerns prompted initial tests at Ellenbrook on native seedlings in 2003 under the aegis of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority (BGPA). In 2005 commenced the FESA-funded, FESA-assisted, doctoral research by David Leach of the University of Western Australia undertaken at the BGPA.

Ten (10) fire suppression products (one long term retardant, seven short-term foams and two gels) were elected by FESA for inclusion (Leach, 2013). The findings pointed out that:

- i) The USDAFS approved long-term retardant, Phos Chek G75, contained appreciable levels of Boron even though this was listed as a banned substance in the USDAFS' own approval process
- ii) A "good start" to limit environmental impacts was to pre select fire suppression products according to their low levels of S and P. Those preselected could then be considered for any general emergency use as fire suppression products in Australian fire prone woodlands, shrublands and forests.
- iii) The need to test for the environmental impacts of pre selected fire suppression products after deployment on active Australian Bushfire.

Two foams (Silv Ex and FireAide) and two gels (Barricade and CLEAR ETI) exhibited the lowest S and P levels according to their nutrient analysis thus pre qualifying for live Bushfire suppression trials.

It is the joint responsibility of all Fire Agencies in Australia to ensure that the transparent, unbiased, unfettered live trials here demanded versus the VSC are urgently undertaken without delay using "best" fire suppression contenders: Silv Ex, FireAide, Barricade and CLEAR ETI. The design of these trials and the results must promptly be made public in full and without the need for pursuit of detail under Freedom of Information. Openness is critical to cut past any possibility of direct or indirect constitutional roadblocks and any members of Fire Agencies in Australia or Unions in Australia who may prefer the status quo or may be agents or may be sole agents for certain entrenched fire suppression products already being purchased.

Armed with the massive advantage of the "best" fire suppression product we will meet Australian Firestorms on uneven terms. Failure to arm under the VSC will demand a Full Royal Commission.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

References:

Leach, D.R. (2013), *Fire Suppressant impacts On Flora Of The Swan Coastal Plain*, Ph.D. Thesis, UWA. [http://research-repository.uwa.edu/files/4562696/Leach\\_David\\_R\\_2013.pdf](http://research-repository.uwa.edu/files/4562696/Leach_David_R_2013.pdf) (Accessed 02 March 2016).

Attached testimonial: North Stradbroke Island Fire – 2006 (Received 11 March 2016).

## NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND FIRE – 2006

North Stradbroke Island is predominately a sand Island ideally a relaxed holiday destination with the main industry being sand mining where Rutile is extracted.

The Island lies off the coast east of Brisbane Queensland, and is serviced by two Stradbroke Ferries services and water taxis. The Island has a small light airstrip and a number of aircraft hangers, etc.

The vegetation is mainly native species and heavily includes Banksia bushes which the bud when exposed to fire causes them to explode and travel a considerable distance adding to spreading the fire. The nature of the Island being largely sand causes the fire to burn the tree roots under the sand and the wind blows away the sand the fire reignites up to a number of days later, etc.

There are 3 Auxiliary staffed fire stations Dunwich, Amity and Point Lookout with around 15-20 Auxiliary (part time) firefighters. There are 2 police stations on the Island Dunwich and Point Lookout. The Island relies on the tourists as a holiday destination and during the summer months many campers and holiday makers swarm to the Island as the population swells by 25-30,000 people.

~~Because of the nature of the Island and how it reacts to bush fires we had followed a hazard reduction plan to protect the properties.~~

When a fire started on the Island we had to move considerable fire-fighting resources quickly. We usually had to wait for the vehicle barge to transport fire appliances to the Island taking over an hour or longer, etc. Extra resources were called on to and provides support with the Rural Fire Service crews totalling up to 20 – 25 fire appliances several aircraft fixed wing & helicopters dropping fire retardment which had to be bought to the Island, etc.

**The 2006 fire;** I was the Fire Commander and I some how became aware of this product and spoke with Marc on the phone and arranged for a sample of MVP CLEAR - AQUEOUS CLEAR ETI to be sent to us for trial. After the product arrived on the Island, a 4x4 Light Attack fire unit was prepared with the product being added into the water tank as per the directions. We found that the fire could be stopped by direct application of the product and by laying a pattern channel on the vegetation and the fire front. As the fire burnt up to the line the flame stopped at that point. We also found that the application of the product to the burning tree stumps logs etc, the product worked quickly to extinguish the active fire or deep seated smouldering logs, etc. We were able to bring the fire under control and contained within a shorter time. Any fire fighting efforts were a combination of multi agencies including the mine, local council & indigenous Quandamooka people and Government agencies. In summary the trial and application was successful and the product did as what was expected for it to do in the control of a bush fire. The product was not trialed by aircraft water bombing as the sample quantity provided did not allow. I don't doubt that it would be as successful as a fire retardant suitable for water bombing. I would be interested in the results from this means of application to a fire front by bombing, and I would expect it to be successful etc.

Climate Change is real and going to cause much more serious and disastrous bush fires destroying rural communities as we are already seeing. There is an urgent need to find better ways to control large bush fires we will come to experience now and in the future.

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 23 March 2016 4:13 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** TRIM: Re: Special Inquiry - Yarloop Fire

**Categories:** Blue Category

Hi Narelle,

Thankyou for your reply & I am most apologetic, was unable to respond before today. There have been far more urgent things to deal with over the past week leaving me no opportunity to forward my thoughts and concerns in relation to the Fire.

I first noticed smoke to the East of Yarloop around mid-day on Wednesday 6th March, as it was an extremely hot day with strong & gusty ENE winds blowing I decided to check the FESA Alerts website. There was an alert about a fire in the Lane Pool Reserve SSE of Dwellingup, but nothing of any concern nor any mention of any alerts for our area - Waroona/Wagerup/Yarloop.

The smoke plume grew into a huge black cloud, dropping burnt leaves, large chunks of bark & significant ash all afternoon. This prompted me to telephone the DPaW office in Harvey @ 3.00pm, to enquire about the actual location of the fire. The call was diverted to the Collie Office & answered by Jade, she transferred me to Tom who told me the fire was being managed by Mundaring DPaW & he gave me the number to call if I required further information. He told me there was nothing to worry about here in Yarloop as by the time the stuff falling out of the sky reaches me it will be cold.

At approx. 6.00pm I was becoming concerned as the amount of burnt debris falling out of the sky had increased significantly, the wind was now NE & very strong & gusting, there was also a huge red glow on the skyline to the ENE. I started to think about my "bushfire plan", began assessing what to take, where to go & what needed doing on my property first. As I was about to start wetting down the buildings it commenced raining (around 6.30pm), so I left that job & went out to open up all internal paddock gates to give my sheep a chance of survival.

By mid evening I had both my daughters phoning to ask if I was getting ready to "go", one lives at Uduc, the other at Australind, both had serious quantities of burnt leaves, bark & ash falling from the sky at their homes too, plus the glow on the horizon was visible to them. I commenced packing the car, continually checking the FESA Alerts page on-line, no mention of any threats to our area were seen, even when I did my last check at about 1.30am on the 7th March.

I self evacuated, with help from my youngest daughter & 2 friends from Australind, we went to my eldest daughter's property at Uduc, arriving around 2.30am. Due to the look of the horizon, very little sleep was had by any one of us. By Thursday afternoon we were becoming very concerned about the safety of our location at Uduc, my daughter commenced watering down every paddock & moving livestock to the greenest paddocks, yet the FESA Alerts page still gave no hint of any danger to the Wagerup/Yarloop area. The extreme heat coupled with the violent North Easterly winds were of grave concern to us ALL day!!

I kept watch on the horizon as my daughter fire-proofed her property & as the sky became black at around 4pm it was even more ominous than earlier. As darkness fell I could see the red glow of what appeared to be a huge volcano, pulsating behind the hills, suddenly a fire-ball erupted over the hill at about Dix Road, then another at about Logue Brook Dam Road, another near Wagerup then a huge fireball absolutely lit up the sky at what I believe was Yarloop, several smaller fire-balls erupted further North of there, it looked like the whole world was on fire, I was terrified by what I could see. This was about 8pm & from then we began to evacuate Uduc, relocating to Australind, by the time we got there we heard Yarloop was gone, Harvey was being evacuated & Australind was on "Alert".

I find just writing this detail is extremely distressing & still to this day have NOT received any warning, alerts, messages of any kind to tell me Yarloop was under threat, also the FESA Alerts NEVER mentioned Yarloop until after it was incinerated. I believe the people in "Control" of the operations should have recognised the extreme weather conditions coupled with the seriously dry winter/spring left us in a situation of a "Disaster waiting to happen".

I ask WHY was there no warnings issued to Yarloop??

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I ask WHY was there no alerts on the FESA website???

I ask WHY was there nothing done to quell the fire or at the very least control it before nightfall on the 6th March????

I ask WHY there was no door knock of residents done once the fire reached such a devastating level?????

I personally have lost all my possessions due to the lack of WARNING & my home has serious damage due to the failure of the Fire Controller/Commander!!

I am now left with restrictions & limitations on what can & cannot be done to remediate my home, due to the town of Yarloop being under "State Control" & now with the rain & cold winds, limited power & temporary water am forced to live in less than comfortable conditions.

Lastly I would like to add that to give people such a limited time to respond to this Inquiry after such a devastating event is very unfair.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]  
Ph: [Redacted]  
Mob: [Redacted]  
email: [Redacted]

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [WaroonalInquiry](#)  
**To:** [Redacted]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 10, 2016 1:48 PM  
**Subject:** RE: Special Inquiry - Yarloop Fire

Good Afternoon [Redacted]

Thank you for your email and time on the phone to discuss the timeframes for submissions during this stressful time you are currently experiencing.

As discussed, we are happy to accept your thoughts and concerns in an email by next Friday 18 March 2016 and the information you will be providing will also be considered as part of the Inquiry.

Should you require any information regarding the Inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact the Inquiry team on 9482 1750.

Kind Regards

**Narelle Edmonds**  
Executive Officer  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry

Tel: [Redacted]  
Email: [narelle.edmonds@semc.wa.gov.au](mailto:narelle.edmonds@semc.wa.gov.au)

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 10 March 2016 12:30 PM  
**To:** WaroonalInquiry  
**Subject:** Special Inquiry - Yarloop Fire

To Whom it may concern

I would like to enquire why the closing date for submissions was only 15 days after the advertisement appeared in the paper??

Apart from losing all my worldly possessions, the stress of dealing with the aftermath & myriad of important issues needing to be dealt with on a personal basis, to be allowed such a short timeframe for submissions on such an important item is extremely unfair.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 25 March 2016 3:57 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** TRIM:

**Categories:** Blue Category

To Euan Ferguson,  
Hi Euan my names [REDACTED] and i live [REDACTED] in lake clifton .  
As of Thursday 7th of January 2016 our lives changed dramatically as a result of the bush fires . The start of many failures due to irresponsible senior staff covering all aspects of the fire coordination and there are many . The road closure on old coast road on Thursday 7th January in the am hours ,not one person in management decided to notify any resident along holmes , haub or knox rd , they had all say ? Puzzling .

Next and most importantly was the txt message i received on Friday the 8th of January at 4.30 pm from dfes that we were in iniment danger and too evacuate immediately ..... 24 hours after the fire had hit .... well done.

Many failures ... too many in fact . I fill sorry for the ground crew of both volunteers and career fire fighters as any person at the helm has little knowledge and has lost total control of how too manage a catastrophe of any level . May i suggest but will not be heed that you listen too locals and the old cockys whos knowledge and experience are constantly ignored . How sad

As several residents of haub and knox road were without power for 21 days ...yes thats 3 weeks ....with just lies from western power and the likes . To add to our woes we were judged by his lord ship Ian Curley the ceo of waroona shire .... that .. gulp its hard too swallow .. that we were not affected by the fires ... i suppose his right as no media mention once was of lake clifton fires .

There is many aspects that need to be addressed, many lessons need too be learnt . PROACTIVE ... learn that word .... we as in myself and my partner failed miserably but have accepted this and now have made changes ... changes that will forever benifit us in future ..... hope we never ever need to utilize the \$1500 fire trailer and sprinklers .

I have contacted several government agencies in relation too the fires and as sad as it is all i get is hand balls , excuses and not my job .... well thats a great way too be proactive ...

I could go on , much more too say . Please if you would even consider contacting me it would be an input or the very least a learning curb as i was an innocent victim that was impacted by th lake clifton fires .

Hope this is heard and not another hand ball .

Regards [REDACTED]

Ph [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 29 March 2016 7:56 PM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** Points of concern

[REDACTED] the main points are:

1. **Bush fire risk management:** The main fire fighting agencies in WA in the last 4 years have focused on operations - bushland mitigation has not become a priority. With the effect of climate change on bushfires, the lack of bushland mitigation has had catastrophic effects on town sites in WA. This was very evident at Waroona, Esperance and Yarloop.

2. **Metropolitan areas versus country:** DFES has been run by career Fire and Rescue staff out of Perth who have very little knowledge of, or exposure to, country emergency services. The impact of this has seen a great divide being developed between country and metro, to a point whereby country volunteers in general do not have any confidence in DFES administratively or operationally.

3. **Culture:** It is common knowledge that the United Firefighters Union runs DFES. This is detrimental to emergency services in WA, given their lack of skills, knowledge and experience in working with Local Government, Bushfire Brigades, State Emergency Service Volunteers and other stakeholders. Their knowledge of bushfire leaves a lot to be desired, however I must acknowledge their key strengths in RCR, Hazmat, Structural fire and other areas.

4. **Incident Management:** DFES incident management teams are managed by rank and not competencies. This is a disaster for bushfires given the number of FRS staff who are inexperienced in managing major bushfires across WA. There appears to be major differences between DPaW and DFES in terms of IMT abilities. Local Govt. volunteers have been excluded from being part of IMTs.

5. **Lack of Bush fire Staff in DFES:** Numerous high level bushfire staff have left the organisation because of the direction of DFES. This has led to staff being promoted in

bushfire land without experience and knowledge. Policies being developed by staff with next to no expertise. In general volunteers do not have the confidence in the current structure of DFES for them to deal with bushfire matters.

**6. DPaW /DFES Relationships:** The relationship between DPaW and DFES has deteriorated across WA since the Keelty report. It is a topic of conversation across the state and needs to be rectified.

In conclusion, WA needs a Rural Fire Service run by bush fire people not FRS. This includes FRS being responsible for the metro area only. Emergency Services in WA would be enhanced significantly under a new sustainable model. I don't believe managers in emergency services should be jacks of all trades. They should be an expert in one.

Thanks [REDACTED] for any assistance you can give with this.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 May 2016 9:58 AM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** SWORD VFES

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 29 March 2016 10:21 AM  
**To:** WaroonaInquiry  
**Subject:** SWORD VFES

Good Morning,

I am the Captain of the DFES VFES component of the State Wide Operational Response Division or SWORD.

SWORD responded to the Esperance and Waroona fire with vehicles and personnel over a period of four days +.

The reason I am contacting you is to bring to your attention a solution to the comments made by the Farmers' Federation and more recently the independent review findings into the Esperance fire.

These comments were raised again during the Waroona fire and that is WA needs a Rural Fire Service.

Most would agree that WA does not need another Fire bureaucracy, the solution therefore is developing the SWORD concept.

The concept revolves around having a specialist team of volunteers who can respond to any incident within Western Australia, who are self-sufficient.

Currently SWORD consists of VFRS and VFES units based in Forrestfield, personnel numbers are around 180.

Unfortunately SWORD VFES do not have dedicated vehicles, they are on loan from the high season pool, SWORD VFRS have two heavy tankers and two light tankers.

My concept would be to have a dedicated fleet of heavy and light tankers, large capacity water tanker, an ICV and IC vehicles.

SWORD could then respond to any level 3 incident within WA and control a Division and/or a sector and be completely independent in regards to personnel reliefs etc.

This concept I believe is a valid solution to those advocating a Rural Fire Service, it already exists we have personnel all we need is resourcing and ongoing support by DFES.

I am happy to discuss this further, and present this concept in person if need be.

Kind Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]