

All communications to be addressed to:

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8th May 2003.

To Joanna Gash.

Thank you, for the opportunity to comment on the issues raised in Wilson Tuckeys' speech 26th March 2003.

As a rural brigade there are some issues raised under item 2 of that speech upon which we would decline from comment, as those issues are outside our area of expertise.

However there are some items upon which we do have expertise and experience, specifically agenda items (2b) (2c) and (2d).

Our comments are set out here-under:

For the most part the points we raise are self evident to those who "want to see " Previous enquiries and committees appear to have tended to either ignore or deliberately overlook the real problems in these areas for perhaps vested interest, self interest or maybe in accepting the truth of the matter it could indict certain areas of authority for negligence and mismanagement.

Having got that off our chest, our comments and recommendations are :-

The causes of fire are obvious. It is what is sustains the fire that is important, i.e. Heat, oxygen and fuel. We cannot do much about removing oxygen and heat is often out of human control due to extreme weather conditions, but we can do something about the fuel.

No fuel, no fire. Even the most bloody minded green, would have to admit to this. It is appreciated that a total no fuel policy is an absurdity, but with the amount of fuel Loading reduced, fire intensity is also reduced, rending the situation more readily manageable and safer for fire fighters and the general community at large.

It is blatantly obvious that low hazard reduction or would it be more correct to say that lack of hazard reduction has been a major contributor to the disastrous fires of recent years. This coupled with closed fire trails or poorly maintained fire trails, has not helped fire fighters efforts in a number of instances.. Should we have been able to access the fire and stop its spread this could have saved the destruction of many square miles of virgion bush, as well as the heartbreak associated with the destruction of people's homes and property.

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1. The responsibility for hazard reduction at rural/suburban interface needs to be delegated on the ground to local brigades who have a concise appreciation of the problem and a responsibility to the local community who look to the brigade for security and who also support the brigade financially. By adopting this approach this would create a streamlined and efficient method of handling fuel reduction, rather than being lost in the ether of beaurocracy and red tape.

Land Management.

The creation of buffer zones between forest, national parks and villages should be mandatory. Fuel can be reduced in many ways, i.e. by culling of overpopulated forest species, and physical removal of fuel loads by permitting people to take any grounded timber, etc. for example in our area here where our village adjoins the National Park, there is a policy whereby grounded timber cannot be taken within any area associated with the village, however if it were permissible for grounded wood to be removed it would certainly reduce fuel loading and consequently in itself, constitute a hazard reduction. We believe that hazard reduction or low fuel policy is essential in rural urban interface. As a point for discussion to a minimum of 500 metres (subject to debate depending on the terrain and obviously the nature and type of fuel), this should be mandatory, effective now irrespective of often-irresponsible claims by green loopies re endangered species etc. The time for endangered species assessment is prior to building approval, not after.

3. We note that it is intended the Committee be comprised of 14 members. We believe that for any findings or recommendations to be meaningful, the Committee should include representatives from the Rural Fire Service at active fire fighting level, i.e. Fire Control Officer, Group Officer or Captain.

2. (J) Current management practices.

At the recent Canberra fires our Brigade experienced numerous communication problems with individual landholders, in that they were not notified or informed regarding proposed fire fighting activities affecting their properties. This created inefficiencies, in that resources were allocated to areas where they were ineffective and should have been better utilized in more pressing areas.

We could probably write a book in responding to some of the issues raised by Wilson Tuckey, however suffice to say that he seems to be approaching this overall problem in a manner which if discussed openly and objectively may at last see some sensible decisions made in respect to Fire Control and management.

As you point out we are a volunteer organization and do what we do because of a regard for our community and the sense of responsibility, we not only fight fires, we are no different than other brigades in that we assist in fund raising, help out in times of disaster, etc. We don't have to spell this out to the community the extent of our activities.

We are being loaded down with more and more beaurocratic nonsense, paperwork, and trivia, extended meaningless training hours e.g., hours required for crew leaders

status, such that many of our members are beginning to wonder whether it is all worth while.

We do sincerely hope that this enquiry will produce the desired result and that the right decisions are made.

You will no doubt appreciate our skepticism but at the same time we are very appreciative of your efforts and trust that this time we will see more progress.

We would welcome the opportunity to address any committee member on any issue if it will assist in better understanding of the problems.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. J. Reeves". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and "J".

Ross Reeves,
Captain.

On and behalf of the members of Kioloa Rural Fire Brigade and concerned local residents.