

# MUDGEONGA RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

*C/- LA Reeves,*

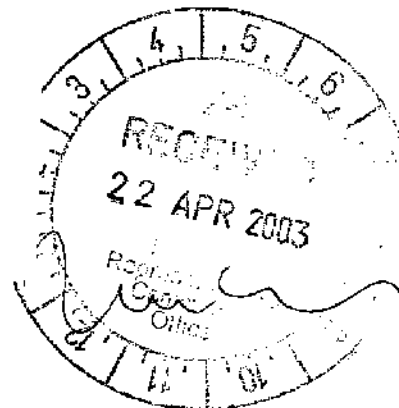
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*Telephone/Facsimile:*

10 April 2003

**Submission No.39**

Sophie Panopoulos MP  
Federal Member for Indi  
117 Murphy Street  
WANGARATTA 3677



Dear Sophie

Please find attached a summary of comments made at a recent debriefing session for the Mudgegonga Rural Fire Brigade.

Would you please pass on our submission to the Federal Government's Bushfire Inquiry on our behalf.

Thank you so much for your help, we appreciate your efforts on our behalf.

Yours sincerely

**Linda Reeves**  
**SECRETARY**

## MUDGEONGA RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

Following is a summary of problems encountered during the fires at Mt Buffalo, Stanley and the Ovens Valley as noted by volunteer members of the Mudgegonga Rural Fire Brigade. These are not intended as a negative criticism of how the whole episode was managed but as a positive tool to go on with and implement changes that will help improve any future situations.

- ✍ Local knowledge was not utilised enough in nearly every circumstance, i.e. it would have been better for a local to have been deployed with each Strike Team and Sector Commanders and their suggestions/advice taken seriously.
- ✍ Strike teams were "wasted" by not being fully deployed for the life of the fires in this area, particularly for "spot" fires after backburns.
- ✍ CFA Strike Teams should be kept separate from DSE operations management. They would be fully utilised and looked after under the control of the **local** Group Officer and/or Deputy Group Officers.
- ✍ Shifts for firefighters should overlap those of Sector Commanders, e.g. 0600 – 1800 for firefighters and 1200 – 0000 for Sector Commanders, so continuity of knowledge of fire ground not lost. Changeover and shifts should be conducted on fire ground and in daylight if possible.
- ✍ Debriefs should be a lot shorter, aimed at Sector Commanders and crew leaders and conducted in a "quiet" area. Maps supplied for fire crews were mostly unreadable photocopies.
- ✍ There were too many radio channel frequencies – teams were confused as to which one they should be using. It also became messy when fires broke out in the Beechworth, Kiewa and Tallangatta areas and everyone in the communications headquarters were using the same channel (102) – some sort of GO TO channel needed. Poor radio reception was a huge problem – more mobile communication facilities needed.
- ✍ Protective clothing, such as helmets and overalls, were in short supply, and in a lot of instances were changed over (warm and sweaty) to the next crew and worn continuously. Not very hygienic for those involved.
- ✍ ICC had "control" of too many fires with the result that a good job was not done on any of them. It was suggested that geographically separate fires have continuity of personnel in charge. This also includes keeping, where possible, Strike Teams in the same areas instead of constantly shifting their area of combat. It appeared there were not enough "locals" in ICC as geographic blunders were the norm rather than the exception. For example the Strike Teams working in Porepunkah were shifted to Buffalo River the following day and vice versa for the Buffalo River based Strike Team.
- ✍ There were a lot of unnecessary delays in putting decisions into action, and quite a few occasions when nothing happened at all, causing immense frustration.
- ✍ It was apparent that basic safety issues were often ignored and Strike Teams from other regions were arriving on site in the dark in unfamiliar territory after the interminable briefings.
- ✍ It was noted that Strike Teams and local DSE and CFA personnel were all frustrated by the lack of common sense displayed by the ICC.