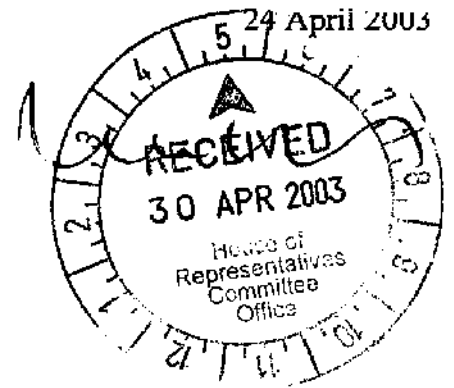


House of Representatives Select Committee
(Bushfires)
Parliament House
Canberra

ACT



Dear Inquiry Members,

I have been a serving member of the NSW RFS for 14 years, since 1994 a crew leader and for the bulk of the time a Deputy Captain or a Senior Deputy Captain, I have attended fires in most parts of NSW, this year I attended a fire in Victoria as well attending eleven Section 44 fires in NSW.

I have attended a coronial inquiry as well as reading transcripts of a few others regarding fires. With input and advice from other volunteers I write this.

Management

Each State has their own differing firefighting structure and management procedures, Differing capitol equipment specifications and purchasing arrangements, independent and un-compatible communication infrastructures. In NSW the RFS management Structure has grown into a very large head office, 'Regions, Districts and individual brigades. Head Office, located inside Sydney is remote in every way from the vast majority of volunteers.

One management difficulty is fire management. The 'control' of the fire is in the hands of RFS staff personnel in the IMT, (Incident Management Team) remote from the fire and in most cases staffed by people with little or no on site fire ground senior management (Divisional) experience. Indeed it would not be unusual for most members of the IMT to have NO fire ground experience. Most if not all fire ground Division and Sector leaders across the State will confirm that this present management control system has major flaws. This is best highlighted in a large fire, rapidly moving and fluid situation on the fire ground, a situation where we least need things to go wrong. The problems range from poor choice of control lines, delays, lack of appreciation of the situation by the IMT, communication bottlenecks, lost requests, misunderstandings of priorities, and the urgency of resource allocation. *It seems a small change but the IMT role should be to support the fire ground commanders not dictating to them.*

Administrative management of the NSW RFS has grown into a very large head office staff with very small numbers of staff at Regional and District offices. An independent inquiry is required to find the most efficient way to run the RFS that

brings the main administration closer to the volunteers. With modern communications there is no need for 95% of staff to be placed in the heart of Sydney.

Within NSW, ordinary brigade members would not normally have a visit from staff members, we might see a District staff officer once a year but this is no certainty. Letters and Emails to head office go unanswered; if a volunteer applies for a staff position and his application is rejected, no reply is the norm, no information at all given. The present system is causing anguish in the volunteer ranks. Our voice is not responded to if it is heard at all.

Hazard reductions

I am not aware of one fire-fighting agency to make adverse remarks in any inquiry about another government land agency manager. No one is ever reprimanded or held in any way responsible for the lack or quality of hazard reductions programs. This rolling neglect causes the fuel loads to reach such levels over large areas that any hazard reduction program becomes much more difficult to carry out and the windows of opportunity to carry out a burn reduction much smaller. With some summer conditions prevailing no human intervention will exert positive control on a fire with high fuel loads.

It is well known that "crown fires" are not self-supporting without high ground and lower story fuel loads. It is these crown fires that enable long distance ember spotting.

In NSW the Local Bushfire Management Committee (LBMC) governs Hazard reduction programs, any failures go back to this committee. I believe it is unknown for a LBMC or committee member to suffer even a reprimand because of a failure to hazard reduce in quantity, quality or risk reduction. There is little or no interagency co-operation in carrying out hazard reduction burns, manpower and costs playing a major part in this situation. In 14 years of service with the RFS not once has my brigade assisted another agency in this work, or been ask to do so. Our Brigade has not carried out any hazard reduction on State (Crown) managed lands for the past 11 years. One person in each District should be held solely accountable for all Hazard Reduction in that District, not a Committee.

Much is made by various agencies on the number of hectares hazard reduced in a given year, no information is published on the quality of the reduction achieved or what intensity of fire the reduction is proposed to control. With the (now normal) fuel loads permitting regular "spotting" of over hundreds of meters in summer conditions. What use is a hazard reduction application that is too limited in depth and or does not remove enough of the fuel to prevent medium distance "spotting" from occurring to enable control of the fire? A hazard reduction should provide a lower risk in all conditions, not fail in any other than mild weather. Present Fire Risk management fails on this score. Some agencies prefer to not to Hazard Reduce along creek edges (bio-diversity or some such thing) yet it is these same valleys that the path of the fire uses. A search of past records would show that all cases of a wildfire fire burning 'over' recently hazard reduced ground; the above factors would come into play.

Radio Communications

In NSW RFS brigades operate with one radio dedicated to communicate with District Fire control, this operates in the UHF radio spectrum. In our local area we self fund and also use a radio system using VHF as a 'backup' due to poor reception in the valleys of the UHF radio. On the fire ground we use another UHF radio to

communicate between fire ground vehicles within a given fire sector. All this sounds great but it's not.

Each agency (NPWS, State Forests and the RFS) have their own different dedicated main radio systems, not compatible with each other's frequencies, basically, we still have to get out of the vehicle to converse with the next vehicle if that vehicle is not one of our agency's vehicles or belongs to our District. We cannot hear what is being said on the main channel to fire control by the other agencies. Each District has their own version of 'fire ground' radio's, in our district we have gone along the 'official' RFS line of frequencies, but it seems most other Districts have gone their own way so radio frequencies are not compatible across the State within the RFS. The NPWS and State Forests do not have a 'fire ground' radio system. Across all States. All States have gone their own way, each incompatible with frequencies ect.

I thank you for this opportunity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Davison', written over a horizontal line.

Alan Davison
Deputy Captain