

My name is Peter Edwards and I am the Secretary of the Maryvale Rural Fire Brigade which is part of the Keppel Group and also the 2nd Officer of our brigade.

I am not a very well educated person but at the age of nearly 69 years I have a history of being involved in political matters and Union activities plus emergency services, such as, C.Q. Mines Rescue, and Rural Fires and as a young man the Urban Brigade.

I have been involved in rural fires since 1991. I was 1st Officer for many years and was involved in the formation of the Keppel Group and the implimentation of the initial Level1, Level2 requirements of volunteer fire fighters which is now advanced to F.M.S. and Crew Leaders courses.

The following are my thoughts on what should happen within the Rural Fire Service of Queensland.

1. The government over the past few years has decided to reduce the number of shires by amalagation which I think personally is going to save the tax payer in Queensland a lot of money but will take time for it to come to fruition. (incidentally I worked for the Livingstone Shire Council for 18 1/2 years before retiring).

2. In our particular area the amalagation took four shires, Rockhampton, Livingstone, Fitzroy and Mount Morgan and condensed them into one regional council.

The discussion paper says, "The service consists of 1525 rural fire brigades and 35,000 volunteers". Now in the Rockhampton Regional Council we have the Fitzroy Group which consists of 16 brigades and the Keppel Group which has 18 brigades. A total 34 brigades. The government has to reduce the number of brigades across Queensland. The Rockhampton Regional Council has to write out cheques for levies received for 34 brigades and I believe that could be twice a year. If Fitzroy and Keppel Groups were to become brigades and the 34 brigades become Stations that would mean that the Rockhampton Regional Council would not have to send out 34 cheques twice a year. It would mean that the Rockhampton Regional Council would only have to send

out two cheques twice a year.

3. We talk about a Levy on people who live in rural areas to support the fire brigade - you can call it what you like but it is a tax and the State Government is responsible for all taxes paid in Queensland so , therefore, the government is entitled to know where the money is going. The following are my suggestions on how that tax is spent.

There are two ways of collecting and distributing this tax. You collect it and distribute it the same as you do with the Urbans and the Q.A.S., or, the money is collected by the Rockhampton Regional Council and distributed to the Keppel Rural Fire Brigade and the Fitzroy Rural Fire Brigade which control 34 stations. These stations do not have atonomy unless they raise amongst themselves money for christmas parties etc. Each brigade i.e. Keppel Brigade and Fitzroy Brigade elect a committee. The chairman is the Area Director or his representative. The Area Director had the casting vote. None of the 34 stations pay rates or power bills for their stations. Ergon Energy bills the committee with an itemised account for each station and Rates are just one account from the Rockhampton Regional Council instead of 34 for both brigades.

4. As I understand it and I've read, brigades don't own the equipment such as, trucks etc. The Queensland government should own and supply all equipment including Fire Stations, P.P.E. etc.,so therefore, they should have control through the Brigade Committees and Area Director what stations stay where they are and what are re-located and what are shut down. *In the early days brigades were formed on an ad hoc* situation. For instance - Maryvale, my brigade, is situated on the corners of Bungundarra Road, Evans Road and Paddy Swamp Road, however, the Bungundarra brigade is in control of the Bungundarra and Evans Road corner which is a stones throw across from our fire station..

5. With regards to the situation where the government doesn't know where the rural fire tax is spent and the condition of the station sheds and equipment. - an independent organisation that has absolutely nothing to do with brigade activities or the Q.R.F.S. should be appointed to inspect fire stations and give and independant assessment to the Area

Director and Deputy Commissioner so that decisions like - closing stations etc., are based on an independent assessment approved by the Deputy Commissioner and Area Director.

Lastly, the Queensland Government has supplied a hell of a lot of equipment across Queensland over the past few years. In good years it sits in the station and may only get used for 2 - 3 months of the year for *fires and training*.

I have noted that there is a concern about recruiting new members. We have another organisation in Queensland called the S.E.S. who in times of natural disasters, such as floods and search and rescue, have limited equipment. The Q.R.F.S. and the S.E.S. should get together and the S.E.S. should possibly do the F.M.S. for rural firefighting and we should do some S.E.S. training so the equipment the government pays for can be utilized better than it is now.

6. I know that this is a tall order in an election year and a hell of a lot of comfort zones within the rural brigades are going to be upset, but, if the government dollar is to be better spent and the people of Queensland given a service next to none in Australia, the government will have to bite the bullet.

A fantastic job has been done by the government with the Urbans and the Q.A.S. I have total confidence that if I am involved in an accident on a road I will have the best trained fire and rescue in the world and the best trained ambulance service in the world to look after me, however, *the volunteers such as Rural Fires and S.E.S., Coastguards etc. need more help from the Queensland Government.*

Peter Edwards.

With regards to Fire Wardens.

A T.A.F.E. college course or a Q.R.F.S. course is not the criteria for a good Fire Warden.

In our case with the Maryvale Rural Fire Brigade comes from 3 generations of rural land owners.

The best way to come up with improvements within the issuing of permits by Fire Wardens is to have meetings across the state with various Area Directors and ask them how their situation can be improved.

I believe that they should be independant of the Rural Fire Service and if an issue arises the Area Director has the final say, however, I believe that the Area Director should take into consideration the experience of the particular Fire Warden.

Peter Edwards.