



THIS DOCUMENT IS MY PERSONAL
OPINION.

PAGES 1-82.

Michael Fraser

The Research Director
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Parliament House

Dear Mrs. Helen Bogiatzis

I have put together as much as I can to show what I have been doing. I had a complete computer breakdown and had to put a new hard drive in which meant that I lost almost all my work.

You will find enclosed

- My short response to your discussion paper of 6 pages.
- Some extracts from magazines
- A copy of the first version of the Incident Report
- Copy of newspaper report about yellow trucks (contact about tribunal cover up)
- Copy of first pages of the VLDF booklet
- Copies of comments by well known reporters

This is yours to do whatever you want.

Also find enclosed a copy of the correspondence I have been sending to the Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell and his responses. All this has been included because of the time it took to fix the computer.

There is a separate cover letter for them. Take note there is several copies that have been sent out and are copyright to me. The other people who have copies have the right to release them whichever way they want.

I hope all this is of help to you but take note I will not stop my own campaign to have the assistant commissioner and the management made accountable over their current misguided management of the Rural Fire Service.

Regards



Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
Cooktown QLD 4895
07 4069 5767
18 / 3 / 2010

Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland
Discussion Paper
November 2009

Dear Sir

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry into the management of the Rural Fire Service. I am a volunteer fire fighter and a member of a rural fire brigade

I have been attempting to get answers from both my local district office and then directly from the assistant commissioner since September 2008.

I must add that the local district inspector has been more than helpful and has tried to do all he can within the limits placed upon him.

Please note that due to internal restructuring the head office now calls itself Rural Operations. These changes have been made over the last few years under what the Assistant Commissioner Rothwell calls changing to 'the needs of the community' without consulting with the members of the volunteer rural fire brigades. (Please refer to copy of page 2/3 of the Volunteer Learning & Development Framework booklet)

Rothwell has not explained what the 'needs of the community' are nor supplied any copies of the information he used about the needs of the community.

Section titled ***Inquiry Background*** of your discussion paper.

This partly states...***to ensure the efficient and effective management of Rural Fire Brigades*** This is the wrong direction to be looking.

During the current Royal Commission into the Victorian Bushfires of 09 it has clearly shown that the 'chain of command' was inefficient and that the higher up the chain the less they knew of the fire situation. There were power struggles where information about the fire was not shared between other areas or even to head office.

The fire brigades and the volunteers were doing their job, namely fighting the fire.

When centralizing control and power to a city based office and then creating a chain of command where each individual is competing for the next level and more pay is creating a power hungry bureaucracy more interested in position and power. Claiming they are the experts and 'the authorities'

The wording should change from (to ***ensure the efficient and effective management of Rural Fire Brigades***) to ensure the efficient and effective support of the Rural Fire Brigades and the effective management of the management.

Brigade Funding

Whatever the Auditor-General findings regarding adequate reporting systems and the level of knowledge of funding resources of rural brigades stated in their report is to that point real, yet in reality the management right up to the assist comm. level do not concern themselves with the brigades at all.

Management has no requirement that the brigades send in annual financial reports. They have no idea how much it costs to run a rural brigade and in small communities with every other club and organization after local donation money it is almost impossible to find funding other than the rural fire levy.

As regards the truck we have always had rules regarding servicing, repairs and replacement of tires. Because it is an emergency vehicle only new tires can be fitted which results in extra costs each year if more than one tire is damaged in a year.

- **Rural fire levy.** This is one area that the management had no idea about. They simply have a downloadable one/three year sample budget to use when submitting an application to council. This is all the advice that some staff now employed by QFRS can give to help overcome the problems when applying to council for the levy. When I first mentioned this problem with the local district office they had no idea that rural brigades were having problems in lodging and receiving the funding collected by council. (Refer to the copy of my original submission to the assist comm.) Briefly the problem is that council has its own auditing requirements that until recently have held them up from handing over the money until their accounting is finished. This has taken up to twelve months from the time the levy was collected. When I told district inspector Bryan Cifuentes of this problem he agreed to accompany my local brigade secretary to the local council and discuss this problem with them. As a result council now hands the money over as soon as it can enabling my local brigade to have the money on hand for the fire season. There is other problems associated with lodging the levy submission, namely to do with the requirement of having to supply council with a full financial report and filling out a three year budget. Council will not accept a one year budget. One year the council rates officer refused to impose the levy because we still had money in the bank. We tried to explain that that would go towards a replacement truck; they have not stopped it since. A QFRS UNI grad said why not put that money in a different account, great advice. This is just some of the problems associated with the levy (again please refer to the copy of my original submission) this section alone needs major investigation and the process of lodgment with council simplified.
- **Grants by third party organizations or by the rural fire brigades association.** These are all well and good yet try to do it. We get very little information from the association to be able to apply. Two years ago I spoke to a staff member who after I went through the list of problems from levies, getting fire breaks done by council and a myriad of other items she said that she had no idea all this was going on. What I have found is that no one has been speaking up, they grumble within their local brigade members yet have never told any of these problems that are effecting us all to their local district inspectors or the assist comm..
- **Fundraising activities.** Again here is a problem. Small communities have many small clubs such as horse riding, fishing, cricket, football, art, music, etc all competing for the same raffle/donation money. My local brigade relies on the levy and donations by landowners. This area has around 80 ratable blocks so our income is small and a major breakdown (such as the pump dying) could quickly drain any accumulated money. There is nothing within all the paperwork from the RFS management that they have an understanding of the funding or costs of running a rural brigade. I have been told that management is considering dropping the co-contribution by rural brigades who have incomes under \$20,000.
- **Donations by individuals** As above, we do get some donations from local landowners but only after putting out a fire, doing a pre season burn or other hazard reduction activity for them.
- **Personal protective equipment** Yes this is supplied free yet is not researched. It is simply sourced from catalogues at a price. The management does not have a research and development department to test or design new and better equipment. (refer to the copy of my original submission) I asked the assist comm. to wear the helmet, eye goggles, nose and mouth smoke protector in his office for an hour and try and keep them on his head. He has not made a comment on this yet. Another point I have mentioned in my original submission regards the drinking water container fitted to the truck. Dehydration is a major risk to fire fighters yet Rothwell has not improved this in all these re-organizations he has overseen. Since sending my request to Rothwell for answers to my concerns a major study by a research institute is being done into fire fighter dehydration. Again this management is more interested in secure jobs then running an efficient emergency service. This is where an R&D department would come into its own. Why is there is not one, is it because the current management have structured what they now call Rural Operations into a organization to support their long term career aims rather then as a emergency unit

dedicated to the service of the community. Not some unaccountable unreachable city based centralized control power.

- **Subsidised fire appliances** As stated there is some mention that small income based rural brigades with less then \$20,000 incomes will not have to find that extra 20%. There is no word if this will happen yet it should. For a community to get a truck is quite a journey. First a dedicated team is needed to do all the funding raising and this can take several years. Then a suitable block of ground has to be found, which can not be privately owned so it has to be council land. Then funding for a shed has to be found and finally volunteer trade's people and helpers have to be found to help erect the shed. This is often a hard and long term commitment and very little help comes from Rural Operations. By the way the state government budgeted some 12 million to rural operations to replace all the petrol firefighter pumps with diesel ones yet Rothwell has not mentioned any time frame to do this in the future. What is the money being used for in the mean time.

Local Government Act.

I have mentioned this above. It does deserve its own section. Can you see the problem here, there is two separate entities here, one doing the firefighting the other (council) collecting the money. Both acting under different government acts. Due to the long term problems I had a meeting and phone discussions with district inspector Bryan Cifuentes to explain all this. The meeting Bryan had with council did resolve some of the issues and council resolved to allowed the monies collected to be paid as soon as possible after they are collected. This has gone some way towards finding a state wide solution yet this is not happening due to the assist comm. not coming on board.

The local government act would need to be changed to simplify the lodgment and dispersal of funds collected. At the moment it is covered by too many variations and needs to be looked at and covered under one system. A simple one page levy lodgment paper and corresponding simplified council collection act should be considered. By the way since this has been brought to the attention of the district inspector the Cairns district office now wants all local brigades to send a copy of their levy submissions to council to enable them to stay up to date with any problems in this area. I have no knowledge if this is now state wide due to the assist comm.'s continual attempts to contain all questions within the Cairns district office.

Resource allocation and communication

We now have incident reports to fill out after each fire event. Be assured rural operations did not have any way of knowing what was going on other then in the south east corner of the state. At the same time the amount of paperwork rural operations require now is starting to reach saturation levels, it has gone from one extreme to the other.

This is what prompted me to originally ask the local district inspector for more information about having to fill out the incident report. (see copy of his reply) In September 08' I attended a fire that took 7 hours to put out, after filling out a report I added a request for a copy of the information collected by these reports. This could not be done as even the inspector had not seen one.

Major point... What does the management at rural operations do with this information they gather and why is it not released within rural brigades.

The truck and shed have been inspected several times now and regulations about truck maintenance and all work having to be done by licensed mechanics. There should be a system in place whereby brigades can submit requests for changes to their trucks to suit there local area. At the present time the trucks are built to a price and the same truck is used to cover all areas, yet Queensland covers several climate zones with all trucks built to the south east corner standard. (See copy of my original sub to the assist comm. regarding this and why the RFS should be split from rural operations and moved to a more central location in a regional area)

My local brigade truck is fitted with a plastic bull bar which is almost useless in the bush. I have been campaigning for a metal one to be fitted yet have got nowhere with this. This problem blends in with the next item.

There is no avenue for individual brigades to interact with rural operations. This will become clear once you have read the copy of my original sub to the assist comm. Steve Rothwell. Every request for information has been redirected back to the local district office. When I sent the first request AC Rothwell copied my document and sent a copy to the Cairns office where all staff read it. Rothwell's first reply has an undercurrent of 'how dare you question me' to it and that I am only to contact the district office. He stated that the district inspector could speak on his behalf. Also in the reply he states that the district inspector will if he is not able to provide an immediate answer to a certain matter then providing it is reasonable and time constraints permit, he will make further queries and provide a response as soon as practicable. This implies that all the questions I put to him will not be answered. By the way when I rang Bryan Cifuentes soon after receiving this first reply and read out what Rothwell had stated about being able to talk on his behalf Bryan stated that he had not been told about that. Of the copy of my document he said that he could not answer any of the questions as they were all at policy level and should be answered at Rothwells level. So I kept sending the request to Rothwell who keeps referring me back to the district office. This clearly shows that Rothwell and rural operations has no intention of being accountable nor allow brigade or individual interaction.

The Auditor-General in making a lot of these findings and placing more requirements upon the rural brigades is not taking into account that we are all volunteers and as such are doing this as a free service to our local community. There is nothing ad hoc about the way we conduct ourselves doing this free service. That statement clearly shows that city living and city minded people making decisions about the way rural people conduct themselves and interact with each other is one more reason why the Rural Fire Service should be separated from Rural Operations and moved to a regional area as a independent organization with all staff then living in the rural area. Rural Operations under the current assist comm. should remain the rural part of QFRS covering the south east/west corner.

Creating more structured and constant training will push more of the current members and future recruits away leaving a small core to cover the work load. One training course we had to do involved a set model situation where we had to work out the best way to fight a fire. The trainer turned up with a lap top, projector and screen having to stay overnight this was a costly exercise. This course had to be held at night so our working members could attend. At the end when he asked for questions I said that not one part of the lecture covered the type of vegetation or fire situations we have in this area, several other people agreed with the question, at that the trainer answered that we would have to adjust the lesson to suit our area. This also shows that the management of rural operations clearly is simply doing this to show they are improving everything that the Auditor-General has commented on.

Once a volunteer has completed basic training they then gain experience attending real fires and under the guide of the experienced members they soon gain the knowledge of how fire burns in the local area.. What the Auditor-General and the management of rural operations can not see is that as local people we understand the local area. (See copy of my original sub to assist comm. about this problem and the reason for the separation of the rural fire service from rural operations) Everything that Rothwell is putting out and we are talking millions of dollars being spent on developing and printing glossy training manuals covering all the new chain of command levels has all modeling based on the south east corner.

Forward planning and risk management

The first two pages of the volunteer learning & development framework booklet clearly place the volunteer firefighters as the only defense against fire. Walk into your local council office and try and find any information about fire in the information rack. With more and more people moving to rural lifestyle blocks, many of whom have never experienced fire events before, Rothwells rural operations should be developing highly detailed information to help people understand fire, their responses as landowners and how to prepare their property to protect against fire. (Again read the copy of my sub to Rothwell)

This area is a mine field for Rothwells rural operations. When my local brigade asks the local council to clear fire breaks it takes weeks of letters and phone calls before any action is taken. They can't get funding, they have no spare machine etc. In the end they do clear a few.

As the clearing or formation of new fire breaks do not have formal regulated guidelines about the construction, design or sighting of the fire breaks you should give serious consideration to it.

At the moment the machine operator simply drops his blade and scraps the overburden to one side then comes back the other way and scraps that to the other side, this leaves windrows of dirt and dry grass along each side of the fire break. Fire simply jumps across these windrows. Council is reluctant to clear old fire breaks because of no funding yet can get funding for new fire breaks. .

Land clearing laws allow for a 10 meter fire break around rural land yet landowners are not compelled to do this fire break nor do many do it voluntarily.

This is the real first line of defense, yet Rothwell does not understand this. Councils do not understand this. More needs to be done in this area.

There is no planning other then preseason burns coming out of rural operations and not all preseason burns are done mainly because rural operations does not allocate enough money. There is a real need for a full audit of where the rural operations budget money is being spent

Accountability

Your statement that the Auditor-General considers each rural fire brigade and all money etc should be accounted to rural operations. What is going on here, we as local people put so much time and effort to get a local fire truck and he wants to take control of it. Think again, if that happens you will have to pay the volunteers the same as the urban red truck staff. Take the community out and you will have to do this yourself.

The Director-General, Dept of Emergency Services has a much better outlook as to the reason for the rural fire brigades, yet that seems to have changed since Rothwell's appointment.

Because of the Auditor-General report No3 the direction has been changed by Rothwell from one of support for the community based rural fire brigades into the power hungry job security seeking chain of command creating bureaucracy, producing millions of dollars of glossy training manuals while at the same time not improving the trucks other then what is absolutely necessary.

This type of training that creates levels of command does create clique groups within a brigade who take over everything and exclude the rest of the members from being included in the running of the brigade.

They hold secret meetings and make decisions without telling the other members.

Why does Rothwell wear a uniform with all the badges when he is not a firefighter? The only paid staff who should wear a uniform is the volunteers and paid staff up to district inspector level.

Fire Wardens

The Auditor-General is looking at this from a city based position. The wardens are better to be separate from the rural fire fighters. They do work well with the local brigades and the concerns the fire fighters have with certain people who do not respect the permit system.

There is a need for better written information about the actions needed by the permit holder to both conduct the fire and reduce the chance of the fire getting away. Most people look at the date and time on the permit then file it away. A separate page detailing all the things a permit holder must do before and during a burn should also be given to the landowner.

Additional to the permit system consideration should also be given to address the problem of landowners who have fires on their land every year towards the end of the fire season. These fires burn too hot and generally are hard to stop.

There is one person like this in this brigade area, who is now well known to the district inspector yet because we need to see the person lighting the fire there is very little that can be done. The latest option we have put to the inspector is that because the land is leasehold could the person be made to put fire breaks around the boundaries. This has been going on for years, the burn is to create green pick for the cattle and also to force the cattle back towards the yards.

There is just no law or action that can force this person to stop lighting fires or to be made to put fire breaks in.

Tribunal cover-up

As a final note I would like to bring to your attention a serious event that happened on the tablelands above Cairns somewhere around 07' or 08'

During a fire a rural fire truck was left at the fire by the urban trucks that also attended. The rural fire crew was not informed of this by the red urban crews that they were leaving and were left in a dangerous situation. Fortunately the rural crew escaped to fight again.

The rural crew lodged a formal complaint with 108 points of concern. The Cairns office was tasked to investigate the complaints and found that they were all of concern and an inquiry was set up. A tribunal of QFRS staff sat to here all 108 complaints.

The result was that all but two of the 108 complaints were deemed to be justifiable yet the tribunal did not take it any further action. They did not change the guidelines for crews leaving the site of a fire without contacting all the other crews at the fire nor did they act on any other of the 108 complaints.

In other words the staff sitting on the tribunal decided to cover up the incident and hope that it would stay that way. What would have they done had the rural crew not made it out of that situation.

This is serious and needs to be brought out into the open; perhaps you have enough power to do that. There are several people who should not have jobs with the fire services.

The 108 complaints need to be reexamined and any found to be of merit need to be included in all brigade operating manuals.

Regards
Michael Fraser

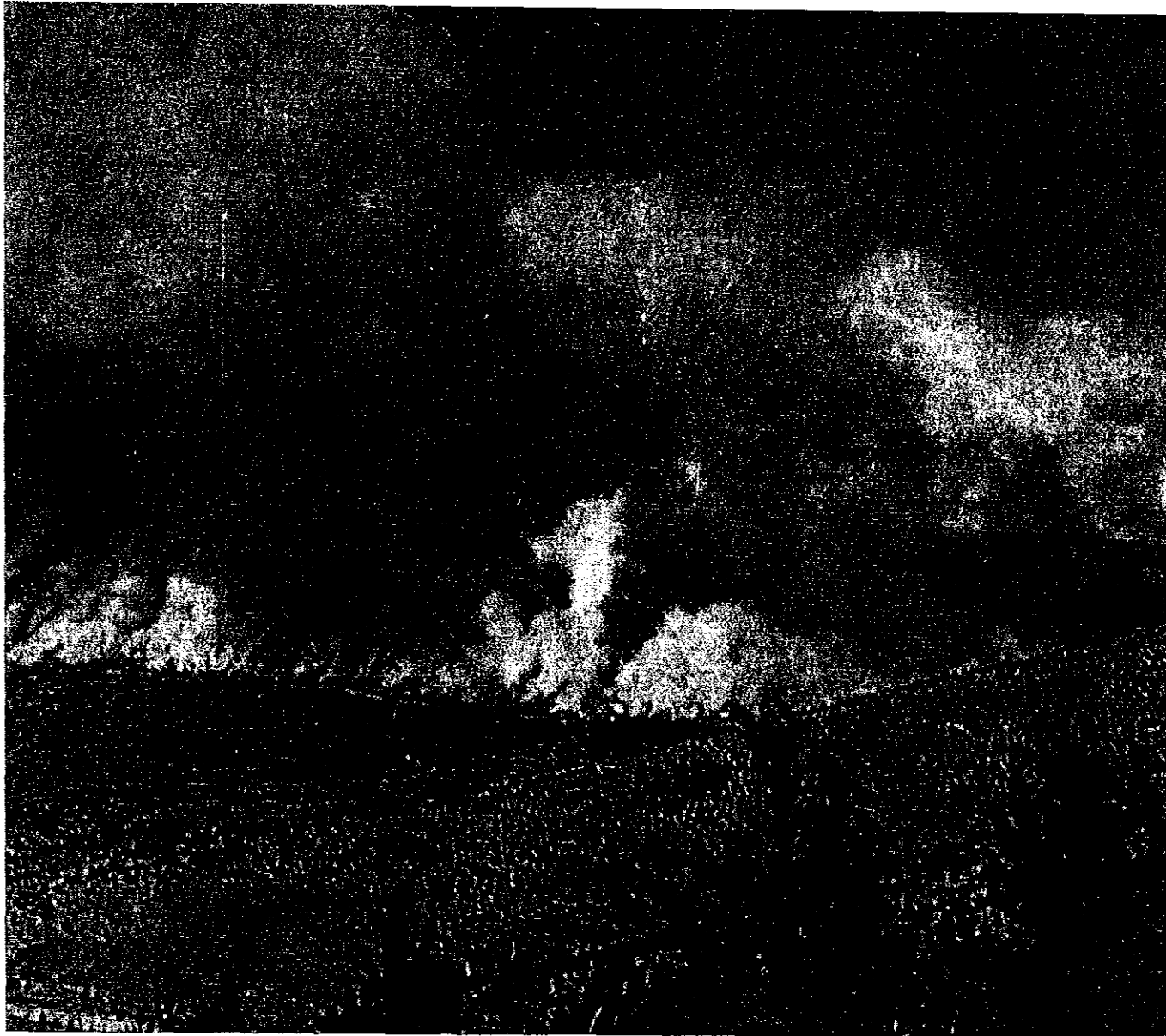


18/3/2010
Po Box 726
Cooktown Qld 4895
07 4069 5767

The following is a copy from a monthly magazine called "Australian Country" dated December 1963

I include this to show that over the years magazines and papers have contributed far more information about fire to the public then the so called experts and the 'authorities' have ever done

Magazines such as 'The Owner Builder' run regular stories about fire protection.



Fire moves at a tremendous speed leaving nothing but scarred remains in its wake. A fire can quickly ruin many farmers who have failed to carry out prevention methods.

PREPARATION BEATS A FIRE

Every week fires are costing Australia £500,000 and four human lives. These are brutal statistical facts on our greatest national hazard. Neglect — a human element — is often the cause of death and destruction.

FIRES wouldn't exist without the three elements of fuel, heat and air. But each year these three separately useful things combine with such deadly and destructive impact that in NSW alone previous bush-fire damage has exceeded £6,500,000!

Prevention is the first and best line of defence for the grazier and farmer. But to battle it out with the "Red Terror" you must be mentally equipped as well as mechanically. Here are the pointers to fire prevention:

See the expert — Check with your local council, police station or brigade

regarding current regulations, particularly in regard to "burning off". The Law says you must do this. Your local forester can estimate much better the immediate combustibility in your district—he's trained for it. Don't guess, never presume — seek expert advice.

The Homestead — It's the natural starting and operational point in your preventive measures. Look for faulty chimneys, overloaded electrical wiring, faulty lights and for "half-made", poorly located incinerators. Remedy thoughtless handling and storing of all inflammables. Is your home spark-

proofed with all windows and ventilators fine-wire meshed and eaves boxed in or meshed? Gutterings should be cleared of leaves. At fire times block the downpipes and fill these gutterings with water.

Remember dry matted couch will burn, but green summer lawns are fire retarders. Clear heaps of firewood, fence posts and droppers away from buildings. Cypress pines are potential torches as also are stringybarks. Are the exterior water taps around the homestead uniform in size, permitting quick hose transference?

The Paddocks — Roads and tracks should have been regraded by now. Did you plan a firebreak system to it in with that of your neighbors? Have you graded or ploughed in breaks along your boundaries — at least 20 feet wide? If you use a forage harvester as a "last minute" measure, remember to throw the surface debris to paddock centres—if you can't collect it. Are your power lines well supported and clear from trees and stock? Did you plan a summer pasture on the danger side of your homestead?

Water Supplies — Natural resources of water supply are limited in usefulness unless they are accessible to vehicles. It's a wise man who fitted 3 inch overhead filling pipes at water tanks for quick filling purposes. If filling points from dams and creeks have been planned they should not be more than 20 feet horizontally or vertically from the water's surface.

Remember strategic placements of 44 gallon drums filled with water. You won't get too far with water trailers or trucks if they are grossly overloaded. Allowing for pumper unit, hoses, handtools and a crew, 200 gallons of water can be carried adequately per ton capacity of truck.

Stock — Have safe, bare yards inside homestead area, well fenced with non-inflammable materials. Running a few "old heads" with young stock can often save a flock. Let stock be their own fire protection in removing dry fodder from around buildings. Ten sheep grazing for 24 hours will clear up as much as a man working for eight hours, using hand tools.

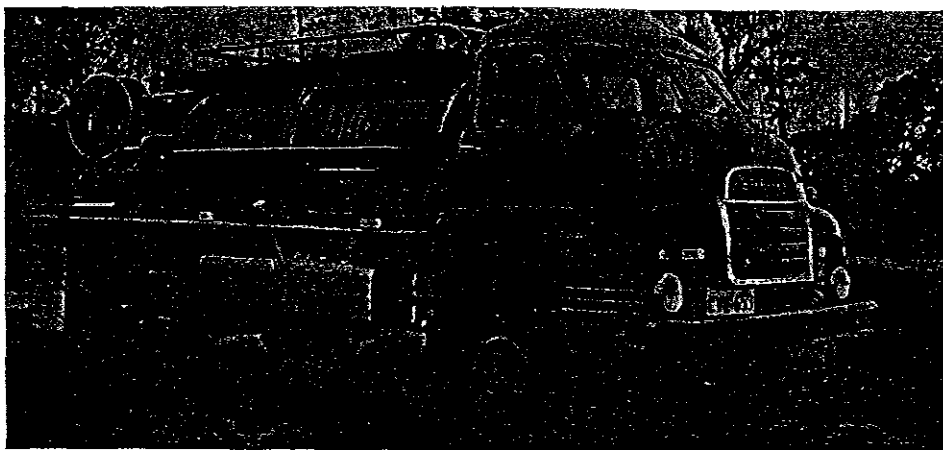
Heavily grazed fallows or irrigated fodder crops might be considered "safe" areas. But, it's not much good having these "safe" areas if the stock can't get to them quickly. Farm management plans should dovetail with fire danger periods to ensure the stock aren't too far away. Proper entry points with good gates are needed to lead into these areas.

Equipment — Have plenty of woollen clothing on hand. Near intense heat wool only scorches but never burns. Have axes, shovels, rakes, hoes, beaters, knapsack sprayers, wire cutters and at least one good first aid kit.

Contrary to some "first up" opinions portable pumper units that are multi-purpose are better. Used throughout the year for sump draining, jetting or spot spraying they are usually ready for use at a moment's notice, since they've had constant use and attention. A two-wheeled fire fighter trailer (kept for this purpose specifically) carrying a 150-200 gallon tank with additional floor space and quick coupling facilities for a pumper unit, hoses and handpieces is a very wise investment.

Fitting this trailer with a dual hitching point to suit both utility and tractor makes it quickly adaptable for towing away.

Fire time — In the homestead re-



One of a number of newly equipped fire fighting units of the NSW Forestry Commission. Simple measures can be taken on properties to safely decrease fire hazards.



Early detection of fires is of the utmost importance. Lookouts in radio-controlled towers watch thousands of acres and promptly report any outbreaks all year round.

move all curtains, blinds and exterior awnings. Close up all doors and windows. Dress in long sleeved shirts, long trousers, long socks, stout boots and a broad-rimmed hat — using woollen materials.

Phone your local report centre giving details of location, size, direction and speed of travel of the fire. Be brief — others may be waiting to ring.

Check on the whereabouts of children and recheck every quarter hour. Let dogs off chains. Bring a ladder into the house to reach manholes, leave buckets of water inside ceilings

where they can be reached.

Wire cutters and a box of matches should be always pocketed. If you're in the midst of firefighting a wet woollen overcoat, wet towel, wet hankies and dark glasses are big helps.

If you get trapped — Burn a patch in front of the main fire to provide a burnt-out refuge. Lie on the ground, preferably in a hollow and breathe through a wet cloth. There's usually fresh air a few inches above the ground. Also lying down reduces the effect of heat radiation.

(Continued on page 40)

PREPARATION BEATS A FIRE

(Continued from page 23)

Bushfire Regulations — Breaking the Law indicated by the various Bush Fire Acts in each State can bring fines up to £200 or imprisonment. During the declaration of a Fire Danger Period burning off permits must be obtained. When fires are lit, neighbors should know 24 hours previously. At least one person must be in attendance during the whole time the paddock is burning.

Camp fires can only be lit on properly constructed fireplaces and the ground should be cleared for 10 feet around. Incinerators require 15 feet

clearance. It's an offence to light a cigarette or smoke one within 50 feet of standing crops or stacks.

Tractors and field machines with engines must be fitted with an approved spark arrestor.

First Aid — First Aid kits and their users should be prepared to treat minor and major burns, inflamed eyes, smoke suffocation, thirst, heat and body exhaustion — and snake bites.

Inflamed eyes are often caused by sweat running from the forehead. A preventive method is to tie a handkerchief around the forehead. Treatment for inflamed eyes is by bathing with a tablespoon of Boracic Acid in

a pint of water. There is no so remedy to thirst than cold tea.

The causes — Ninety-five per cent of fires are caused by man's carelessness of fire. Lightning can and does fires, but usually only after dry derstorms.

Meteorologists, fire control authorities and even statisticians predict this fire season could be most. The statistical chances are high indicated by the 1926, 1939 and national disasters coming in 12-1 cycles. The other experts' warnings are due to the tremendous build up of fuel, caused by a succession of seasons.



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Hazard fires on back burner

Samantha Healy

UP TO 75 per cent of council-planned back-burns were cancelled or postponed this year due to unseasonably hot weather, posing an even bigger challenge for firefighters.

Some areas have not burned in over a decade and are perilously close to homes, businesses and education facilities.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service rural operations director Paul Adcock said some landowners – including councils, private owners and government agencies – might have become “overly risk averse”.

“The risk of doing the burn and it getting out of control, plus the social risk, people with health problems or who don’t want to see the bush burnt, has made some landholders more reluctant to carry out burns,” Mr Adcock said.

“But when we get areas that haven’t burned for 15 years (like in Brisbane) and we move in to an El Nino year, our ability to conduct hazard reduction burns is reduced because it’s drier, hotter and often more dangerous.”

The Sunday Mail has learned that some of the state’s biggest council regions have not completed their planned 2009 back-burning operations.

Brisbane City Council, which published online its 26 “prescribed burn plans” for 2009, has completed 12 burns.

Two areas that have not burned in more than 15 years include a 7.7ha section of Toohey Forest near Griffith University at Mount Gravatt and a 1ha block at Belmont bordered by homes.

Of the state’s major councils:

- Gold Coast City Council completed four of 15 planned burns.

- Sunshine Coast Regional Council completed 11 of 15 high-priority burns.

- Toowoomba Regional Council completed one of four planned operations.

Mr Adcock said the Queensland bushfire season, which normally ends in January, was likely to be extended if rain did not arrive soon.

SUNDAY MAIL 29-11-09



INCIDENT REPORT – VEGETATION FIRE

To be completed by the Brigade in whose area the incident originated.
If the incident occurred in "no-mans-land", to be completed by first attending Brigade.

TICK THE BOX THAT REPRESENTS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT RESPONSE.
ONLY ONE BOX IN EACH FIELD TO BE MARKED.

A3 Brigade Name

A4 Incident Number

Controlled Burn or Wildfire? *(Administrative use only)*

☐ Controlled Burn ☐ Wildfire

G1 Estimated date that ignition occurred / /

G2 Estimated time that ignition occurred *(24 hour clock)*

Hours Minutes

A27 Date Made Safe / /

(The date and time on which the reporting authorities involvement at incident is terminated)

A28 Time Made Safe *(24 hour clock)*

Hours Minutes

A13 Estimated Location of Incident Origin: *(decimals of degrees)*

S Latitude E Longitude

A14 Occupant's Name

A15-A18 Incident Address

Street/Lot Number Street or Road Name

Town, Suburb, Locality Postcode

OR Lot Number. RP Number

A29 Number of Fire Personnel at Scene

A30 Number of Vehicles Used

A33 Number of Aircraft Used

A36 Weather Conditions at time of Outbreak

☐ Direction of prevailing wind

☐ Temperature

☐ Relative Humidity

Velocity of prevailing winds

☐ Still ☐ Light

☐ Moderate ☐ Strong

G3 The total area of bush, forest, grass or crops burnt in hectares

G11 Was fire prevention effective?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

☐ Firebreak mechanical (ploughed, graded)

☐ Firebreak chemical (poisoned)

☐ Firebreak cut, slashed or mown

☐ Firebreak natural, bare earth or rock

☐ Fuel reduced area, previous fuel reduction burn

☐ Fuel reduced area, previous wildfire

☐ Other

(please specify)

WILDFIRE ONLY

A6 Date of Call / /

A8 Time of Call *(24 hour clock)*

Hours Minutes

A9 Method of Notification

☐ Phone call direct to Brigade

☐ Verbal report to Brigade

☐ Reporting Person dials 000 (Firecom)

☐ Other

(please specify)

A23 Type of Incident

☐ Forest or Bushfire (more than 1 ha)

☐ Scrub or bush and grass mixture fire

☐ Grass Fire

☐ Cultivated grain or crop fire

☐ Small vegetation fire less than 1 ha

☐ Other

(please specify)

G7 Vegetation Type

☐ Pine plantation ☐ Native hardwood forest

☐ Cypress forest ☐ Savannah *(open forest and grasslands)*

☐ Wallum and swamp ☐ Improved grasslands

☐ Native grasslands ☐ Crops ☐ Orchards, vineyards

☐ Other

(please specify)

A24 Type of Action Taken

☐ Extinguish

☐ Construct fire breaks

☐ Back burning

☐ Other

A42 Did You Encounter Any Problems *(please specify)*

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what?

☐ Lack of Water

☐ Poor radio communications

☐ Equipment Problems

☐ Response problem: Insufficient information

☐ Insufficient volunteers responded

☐ Difficulty gaining access to scene

☐ Other

A43 Responding Brigades *(attach list if necessary)* *(please specify)*

Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

Brigade name

A56-67 Did any of the following organisations attend?

(Mark off ALL organisations which attended)

- ☐ Electricity ☐ Gas
☐ Water ☐ Police
☐ Ambulance ☐ SES
☐ Environmental Protection Agency
☐ Volunteer Rescue Service
☐ Charitable support agencies
☐ Government welfare agencies
☐ Other _____

E4 Could the cause of the fire be identified?

(please specify)

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what?

- ☐ Equipment exhaust ☐ Cigarette, cigar or pipe
☐ Match ☐ Lighter
☐ Camp fire ☐ Lightning
☐ Heat spreading from another hostile fire
 (i.e. Direct heat, flying embers, brand or spark)
☐ Escaped permitted burn
☐ Other _____

(please specify)

F1 Who was primarily responsible for extinguishing the fire?

- ☐ Rural brigade ☐ Permanent, full time brigade
☐ Auxiliary brigade ☐ Defence Force personnel
☐ Land Management Authority
 (i.e. Forestry, DNR, National Parks, Railways)
☐ Civilians
☐ Other _____

(please specify)

G5 Fire danger rating at time of outbreak

- ☐ Low ☐ Moderate ☐ High
☐ Very High ☐ Extreme ☐ Not applicable

G6 Permit

- ☐ Permit issued, conditions complied with
☐ Permit issued, conditions not complied with
☐ No permit issued, but was required
☐ No permit required
☐ Permit not applicable

G10 Estimated rural property losses

- Number of houses damaged _____
 Number of other buildings damaged _____
 Number of vehicles damaged _____
 Number of kms fence line damaged _____
 Number of Tonnes of hay and fodder lost _____
 Number of sheep lost _____
 Number of cattle lost _____
 Number of horses lost _____
 Number of other livestock lost _____
 Machinery _____

H1 Estimated dollar loss

\$ _____

Estimated maximum potential loss

\$ _____

D1 Number of Brigade personnel injured

D2 Number of other personnel injured

(Injury is defined as requiring treatment by a medical practitioner and at least one day of restricted activity immediately following the incident)

D3 Number of Brigade personnel fatalities

D4 Number of other personnel fatalities

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Is any further action required?

- ☐ Investigation ☐ No further action required
☐ Other _____

(please specify)

Was any private fire fighting equipment damaged?

- ☐ No ☐ Yes _____

(please specify)

Do you require any more forms?

- ☐ No ☐ Yes

Name _____

Rank _____

Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

Delivery Address:

PO Box 1176
CAIRNS QLD 4870

No stamp required
if posted in Australia



Rural Fire Service Cairns
Reply Paid 1176
CAIRNS QLD 4870

15

Seal - Do not use staples

Mrs. Helen Bogiatzis

This is the person I think you need to contact regarding the incident the tribunal sat on.

Regards

Michael fraser



Kuranda volunteer firefighters Michael Vandersar and Jax Bergersen have started a petition to keep their yellow fire truck, which they say is much safer than the white alternative.

Volunteers fight to keep yellow trucks

RURAL firefighters at Kuranda have launched a petition to keep their fire trucks yellow.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service recently proposed changing the colour of all new vehicles supplied to volunteer fires from yellow to white - based on a saving of \$4000 per truck.

Rural station first officer Michael Vandersar said he initiated the petition to protect the safety of volunteers.

"I started this petition because we are concerned for our safety, and the safety of volunteers throughout Queensland," Mr Vandersar said.

He said yellow was a much safer colour in bushfire situations, and changing the colour of trucks would jeopardise the safety of volunteers.

"White is the absolute worst

Sian Jeffries

jeffriess@tma.newstld.com.au

colour in a bushfire, and in smoky bushfire situations because it is simply not visible," he said.

"The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service are going to save \$4000 per truck.

"We keep trucks for 15 years which equates to 73 cents per day.

"We feel they are valuing our safety at less than 73 cents per day."

A spokesperson from the Department of Emergency Services said the pitch was nothing more than a "concept proposal ... canvassed to gain initial views (and) feedback."

But the spokesperson admitted changing the colour of any new trucks being rolled out

would result in "significant yearly savings."

"However at this time, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has not made any change to policy that will result in the colour of Rural Fire Service appliances being altered.

"Before any such change to current policy is implemented, extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the Rural Fire Service volunteer base would be undertaken and carefully considered."

The Kuranda volunteer firefighters launched the petition at the three year anniversary of the Green Corridor project, held on the station grounds recently.

"I managed to get two pages of signatures in the one afternoon, which is about 60 signatures," Mr Vandersar said.

Copy of the first pages of the
Volunteer Learning and Development Framework
Booklet.

This is what prompted me to go directly to the Assistant Director with my request for answers and information.

Message from the Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations

Firefighting is a hazardous job and there are many risks involved in protecting your community against fire. Safety for the nearly 40,000 Rural Fire Service volunteers, who are the front line between fire and families across Queensland, is paramount.

The Department of Emergency Services is committed to a policy of Zero Harm, through a strategy founded on the position that the safety of its people is a value that cannot be compromised. Safety is directly linked to training by ensuring that volunteers have the highest level of knowledge and skills possible to protect both themselves and their community from the impacts of wildfire.

The Volunteer Learning and Development Framework is a new training structure, linking training to volunteer roles. By aligning training courses to Rural Fire Service roles, volunteers have the opportunity to develop and maintain the specific knowledge and skills necessary to perform their role within the brigade.

Given the recent changes to roles within the Rural Fire Service, this new framework provides training for new positions, such as senior firefighter, and of course existing positions including Crew Leader, Brigade Officer and First Officer. The Development Framework also offers training programs specifically for non-operational support roles.

Some of the new courses will be available from July 2008 however, most will commence in 2009 following the review and redesign of existing courses. It is important to note that the new Volunteer Learning and Development Framework is founded on the existing training courses, and that any training you have already completed will not need to be done again.

I encourage you to discuss your options and areas of interest with your colleagues, team mates and Rural Operations staff. The Queensland Rural Fire Service takes pride in its members and the service it provides to communities, and being well prepared and well trained is crucial to the effective preparation for, and response to, Queensland bushfires.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations
Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

Introduction

Why a new Volunteer Learning and Development Framework?

QFRS Rural Operations has embarked on a series of reforms over recent years, to ensure the support and resources provided to rural fire brigades and volunteers is appropriate and sufficient to maintain the valuable volunteer services that assist in mitigating the risk to communities from the impacts of wildfire. Among those reforms are changes to the classification of brigades based upon the functions and services provided, and the subsequent identification of specific volunteer roles.

To support volunteers in these new roles it is necessary to provide appropriate training programs so that volunteers are able to attain the knowledge and skills necessary to safely and effectively undertake their chosen brigade role.

The Volunteer Learning and Development Framework is a new structure on which the learning and development of volunteers will be delivered, it will provide a clear identification of the continuum of required knowledge and skills from new recruit to first officer.

The training programs and courses of this new framework are the platform for training for rural fire service volunteers from 2008 and beyond.

Does this mean more training?

For some volunteers the answer is definitely yes, although for many the focus will be upon ensuring the appropriate levels of underpinning knowledge are suitably covered to be able to exhibit effective operational command leadership and management.

For others however the training they have undertaken in the past, combined with the continued activities undertaken with the brigade is sufficient to address the requirements of their existing role. For long standing and experienced volunteers, there is the opportunity to ensure that existing knowledge and skills are recognised against the Firefighter Minimum Skills (FMS) without necessarily needing to attend training courses.

These are comments by well known reporters. Their comments speak for themselves

Ignoring fire inquiry a peril

By Laurie Oakes

February 14, 2009 12:00am

FOR Gary Nairn, "it's like a nightmare" to recall what some witnesses told him when he chaired the House of Representatives inquiry into the 2003 bushfires that burnt across five states and the ACT.

"Particularly at our hearings in Victoria," he says, "they'd tell us: 'We don't want to be back here in five years' time giving you the same evidence'."

Six years later, hundreds have died in the most devastating bushfires ever, and now very similar evidence will be given to a Victorian royal commission and probably to another federal parliamentary committee as well.

So what did the Nairn committee's findings achieve? "I think a lot of it was ignored," he says sadly.

Australia's politicians, state and federal have shared the shock of the nation over the last week.

And at every level - political, bureaucratic and community - there is a determination that the causes of this disaster be identified and action taken to ensure it never happens again.

But Australia has had many inquiries into bushfires. A report prepared for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) after the 2003 fires looked at the most important of them, starting with the Royal Commission into the 1939 Victorian Black Friday bushfires and including the inquiry into Tasmania's Black Tuesday fires in 1967 and two inquiries into the 2003 Canberra firestorm that killed four people and wiped out 500 homes.

COAG lists a dozen significant bushfire inquiries in all, conducted by state and federal parliamentary committees, government-appointed commissions and coroners. Eight major reports in the last 15 years, not counting COAG's own investigation.

And, as the COAG report stressed, there are consistent themes in the recommendations of all these inquiries.

Among those consistent themes is the problem of complacency. According to COAG: "A level of community complacency appears to have existed before every major fire event."

Complacency is the enemy. After every big bushfire, citizens and politicians are full of good intentions, but we forget quickly. This time we must not forget.

Nairn's committee moved very quickly. It received more than 500 submissions, held hearings across Australia, and within eight months of the bushfires produced a report

containing 59 recommendations but even in that short time complacency had set in.

Nairn, the Liberal MP for Eden-Monaro before being defeated at the last election, was a John Howard loyalist. Howard made him a minister in 2006.

But that does not stop Nairn insisting Howard must share blame with state Labor governments for the lack of action.

The NSW, Victorian and ACT governments refused to co-operate with the committee's inquiry, claiming lack of resources. And Nairn believes they also nobbled Howard to a degree.

"Those three jurisdictions pushed the report to one side," he says. "At the same time, a COAG inquiry was set up.

"I think the prime minister succumbed to pressure from the states to have that COAG inquiry because they saw it as an opportunity to control it a bit more than they could my inquiry."

While he agreed with much of the COAG report, he says: "I think it was a bit wishy washy in some respects and that's probably the influence from the states that didn't want any criticism."

But the Howard government's response to his own report, Nairn says, was even more wishy washy.

"I was pretty disappointed," he says. "It was a frustrating process because our own people went soft. To some degree, rather than reject, they just deferred."

But the COAG report is particularly useful because, by summarising the recommendations of all the other inquiries, it shows how we keep covering the same ground. Essentially, they have all reached the same basic conclusions.

According to COAG: "A consistent theme has been that greater emphasis, resources and activity should be directed towards what are commonly referred to as prevention activities. This includes things such as education and awareness, clearing of fuel around buildings, track access and fuel reduction.

"Education is a consistent recommendation in reports from 1939 to 2003. The recommendations refer to both school-based programs and community information and awareness.

"Since 1939, comment has been made consistently about the poor levels of resourcing, in both fire agencies and land management agencies. Concern about the need for protective burning has been a theme since 1939. Communication and telecommunications infrastructure support have been a consistent theme since 1961.

"The advantages of local knowledge and engaging people who have local knowledge were identified in most reports and have featured particularly strongly in recent reports."

And so on. Each time the same concerns and recommendations coming out of the evidence of firefighters, scientists, landholders, foresters, and ordinary citizens caught up in the terror.

The same "consistent themes" will emerge from the inquiries that will follow the latest dreadful fires. Bet on it.

This is not an argument against the royal commission already announced by the Victorian Government or the House of Representatives inquiry called for by the Federal Opposition.

Rather it is a plea that the findings be treated more seriously this time by all of us, politicians and punters alike. Let's break the cycle of complacency.

Yesterday's news that state governments balked at spending \$20 million on a telephone-based alert system that could save lives in fires and floods seems mindboggling in light of last Saturday's disaster. It is the kind of thinking born of complacency. We have to put it behind us.

Nairn has a suggestion for the kind of inquiry federal Parliament should set up this time.

"There's been a heap of inquiries," he says. "A new inquiry, in the first instance, should pull out all this work already done, some of it not very long ago, and ask the hard questions.

"It should ask what has actually happened, whether recommendations have been taken up or ignored, whether they've been watered down and why. That would make more sense than trying to duplicate a royal commission."

Laurie Oakes is political editor of the Nine Network and conducts a weekly political interview on *Today on Sunday*. **His column appears every Saturday in *The Daily Telegraph*.**

A bit too early to point fingers

Article from: <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/> □ FPRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=The Sunday

By Steve Price

February 14, 2009 12:00am

LAST Sunday morning when a copy of this newspaper hit the driveway and I ripped the plastic off, the text message I'd received the night before was confirmed.

Front page headlines screamed that 14 people had perished in Victorian bushfires.

The night before it had been 12 dead and the rapidly climbing figures confirmed that last weekend in the hill towns north of Melbourne timing was everything.

Again and again last week we heard that sometimes seconds meant the difference between life and death.

Timing a visit to Whittlesea from Kinglake meant some families were separated by the fireball that rolled in on Saturday afternoon.

There are now orphans and widows grieving that their timing wasn't better. And timing is still the dominant theme.

We can only wish that all the smart-arse commentators and columnists who think they should get in first to start throwing rocks and insults and playing politics with this tragedy could get their timing right.

Before blaming the greenies and councils for how the fire happened, they ought to do the right thing and go to Whittlesea - where I spent the early part of last week - and find a few of the following people and tell them the time is right for the blame game.

Find Andrew Grant and look him in the eye and start blaming people.

It will be difficult because this hero doesn't like talking much.

He might give you some time if he's finished saving people with his little water tanker and furnishing the vacant house on his property with beds and doonas to give to a homeless family for as long as they need it.

Or find Jamie Russell and tell him, if you're game, that it's the fault of humans as he weeps about being spared by the inferno that killed his friends.

Jamie calls it a fireball from Hell and doesn't blame anyone because he saw what we can only imagine.

Alan, Carolyn and Stuart O'Gorman are dead.

They lived on top of a hill among the trees in a two-storey house that collapsed around them the day after Stuart's 18th birthday party.

Tell them that if they were alive they shouldn't be living there.

As Jamie Russell said, pointing out that house on Monday: "Mate, we didn't want to be heroes; we just wanted to save our houses."

Problem is, as he explains: "We got hit by a nuclear bomb that came over the hill like a squadron of F/A-18s."

Eyewitnesses say that part of the Kinglake fire travelled 14km in six minutes, not through greenie-protected bush, but across farmland parched from months of drought pushed by a 100km/h wind on a day when the temperature in the shade was 47C.

Timing should mean it's too early to let the climate-change sceptics loose on fragile survivors not looking to blame someone, but trying simply to survive another day.

After the clever critics are finished at Humevale eyeballing those survivors, they should talk to Peter Thorneycroft at Kinglake.

Tell him he should have ignored the advice of professional firefighters that's it was alright to stay and fight.

He might argue with that. After all, he spent an hour on the roof of the local hotel in shorts and thongs with nothing but a bucket.

If he hadn't, the 400 people inside, including 20 women and children in the cool-room, might not be here.

"I never panic, but I was sh***ing myself," he says.

Thank God he didn't panic.

The simple message that I'm sure the people left without anything but the clothes they wore when they fled would like to convey to the shiny-bum experts writing and talking from the safety of their computer screens and desks hundreds of kilometres away would be: leave the blame game for later.

Why not take a leaf out of Ricky Ponting's book and use your time to make people feel better about themselves, not worse.

Ponting let a little boy bowl him first ball at Whittlesea on Wednesday. He made it look like he was trying to hit it.

Unlike the loudmouths in the blame game, Ponting has always had perfect timing.

Steve Price is on 2UE from 9am weekdays. Email: steveprice@2ue.com.au

'Next time, I'll just cut down the trees'

- **Jewel Topsfield**
- February 13, 2009

A COUPLE of years back, Peter Mitchell approached Murrindindi Shire Council, requesting permission to create a firebreak around his home, set on eight hectares of bush in Kinglake.

He was told the council had regulations that prevented residents chopping down trees with trunks greater than a certain diameter.

"I said, 'That's ridiculous, I'm in a fire-prone situation, there is all bush around me and I need to clear a bit more,' " Mr Mitchell said.[Australia%27s](#)

"They said, 'You can put in an application for a permit, but you won't get it.' "

On Saturday Mr Mitchell's Deviation Road home, where he had lived for 15 years, burned to the ground.

When he bought the block, he said, it was just bushland, but covenants had subsequently been put on it, including an environmental overlay.

While he understood the need to conserve native vegetation, people had to be able to defend their homes, he said.

"I've still got thousands of trees. I'm doing my bit for the environment, I'm keeping it as a bush block."

He has vowed to rebuild on the site, but this time he won't even be applying for a permit. "I'm just going to cut down the trees and push the perimeter back a bit more. If I build on the same place, I have to feel I am going to be able to defend it and not play Russian roulette."

Experts take corners as argument reignites

- Daniel Lewis
- February 13, 2009

Could we have prevented Victoria's bushfires?

AS THE blame game that accompanies every major bushfire gathered pace yesterday, opinions about hazard reduction burning remained as polarised as ever.

In one camp are those who argue bushfire danger can be massively reduced by regularly burning vast areas of bush in a controlled manner.

Monash University senior researcher David Packham says the Victorian fire disaster would not have occurred if there had been fuel reduction burning.

In another are people who believe that such burning not only fails to stop deadly bushfires but is impossible to achieve responsibly and can do great damage to the environment.

The likes of former CSIRO bushfire scientist Phil Cheney say the environment and human life would be better preserved by widespread and frequent low-intensity mosaic burning such as that done by Aborigines for thousands of years. but plant ecologists point out that some vegetation types cannot survive frequent fires.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service says that in places such as the Blue Mountains, sometimes there are as few as six days a year when hazard reduction can be conducted

successfully.

John Benson, from the Royal Botanic Gardens, argues that most of south-east Australia's vegetation was not burnt annually by Aborigines.

The *Herald* columnist Miranda Devine has for a long time called for more prescribed burning to reduce bushfire danger and in yesterday's paper she wrote: "It wasn't climate change which killed as many as 300 people in Victoria last weekend. It wasn't arsonists. It was the unstoppable intensity of a bushfire, turbo-charged by huge quantities of ground fuel which had been allowed to accumulate over years of drought. It was the power of green ideology over government to oppose attempts to reduce fuel hazards before a megafire erupts.

"Governments appeasing the green beast have ignored numerous state and federal bushfire inquiries over the past decade, almost all of which have recommended increasing the practice of 'prescribed burning'."

But Andrew Cox, head of the National Parks Association of NSW, said that time and time again it had been shown that, when conditions were suitable, fire could race through areas that had been recently subjected to prescribed burning.

"The bush will carry a fire regardless of what you do beforehand," he said. In extreme conditions, bushfires could rage across treeless paddocks rendered bare by drought and feeding livestock.

"[Hazard reduction] has a negligible effect on slowing or stopping a fire [on bad fire days]."

Rather than burning, Mr Cox said the focus needed to be on protecting homes through schemes such as the NSW Government's Planning for Bushfire Protection policy that dictates fire-resistant building materials, setting houses back from bushland and providing perimeter roads to ensure firefighters can gain access between the bush and houses.

Mr Cox said that in the current high temperatures, "It doesn't matter how many times you have done hazard reduction burning, the fires will be dangerous, unstoppable", and widespread hazard reduction would be "a waste of resources".

The notion that people died because green groups were opposed to hazard reduction was "totally spurious and without foundation", he said.

Michael Doherty, a plant ecologist with the CSIRO and who is studying fire on the bushland-urban interface, said weather and topography were key factors in the weekend's fires. He said that even in pre-European times, severe fires occurred despite burning by Aborigines.

This burning issue of life and death

- Miranda Devine
- February 19, 2009

One of the biggest furbies in the supercharged debate in the wake of Victoria's bushfires is the claim by green groups that they are great supporters of hazard reduction burning.

Also known as prescribed burning, this scientific regime creates a mosaic of lightly burned land at regular intervals of five to seven years, thus reducing surface fuel loads by varying amounts within the mosaic.

This reduction of fuel loads is expensive, but Australia's pre-eminent bushfire researchers, such as the CSIRO's Phil Cheney and Monash University's David Packam, say it has been proven to reduce the power and intensity of fire. Every bushfire inquiry since the 1939 Stretton royal commission has recommended increased prescribed burning to mitigate the effects of inevitable wildfire.

It is a matter of public record that green groups have long opposed such systematic prescribed burning, as is evident in their submissions to bushfire inquiries from as far back as 1992. They complain of a threat to biodiversity, including to fungi, from "frequent burning" regimes and urge resources be spent on water bombers and early detection, as well as on stopping climate change - good luck with that.

Yet last week, Jonathan La Nauze of Friends of the Earth, Melbourne, in a letter to this newspaper claimed: "...not one Australian environmental organisation is opposed to prescribed burning ... Environment groups are engaged in a sophisticated debate about where and how prescribed burning can be most effective."

Yes, it's sophisticated, all right. It just depends how you define "prescribed burning".

On the other side of the country, one Peter Robertson, the West Australian co-ordinator of the Wilderness Society, was singing from a different song sheet. His letter last week to *The West Australian* stated: "Experience and risk analysis show that repeatedly burning tens of thousands of hectares of remote bushland and forest will do little to address the threat of bushfires to human communities ... It would be a huge mistake if the community was led to believe that a massive, expensive and environmentally destructive prescribed burning program was going to protect them when it could make matters worse." Robertson is no lone ranger among greens in opposition to prescribed burning.

The WA Forest Alliance, for instance, lodged a submission to the NSW parliamentary inquiry into the 2001-02 bushfires, claiming: "Frequent fires have a disastrous effect on

many species of flora and fauna and their habitat structure." WWF Australia's submission claimed: "Inappropriate fire hazard regimes can damage biodiversity leading to the loss of native species, communities and ecosystems."

The NSW Greens state on their website as part of their bushfire risk management policy: "There is an urgent need to correct the common misconception that responsible fire management always involves burning or clearing to reduce moderate and high fuel loads..."

In 2003, lightning strikes in fuel-rich national parks in NSW and the ACT sparked bushfires which swept into Canberra, killing four people.

Days later, the NSW Nature Conservation Council's then chairman, Rob Pallin, described calls for increased prescribed burning as "futile" and a "knee-jerk reaction". "People who claim that hazard reduction burning is a cure-all for bushfire risk are either fooling themselves or deliberately trying to fool the public." It is another clever tactic of those who oppose broadscale prescribed burning to claim that it is not a "cure-all" for bushfire risk. No one has ever claimed it is.

As Cheney repeatedly has said, wildfires will occur, but prescribed burning reduces the intensity of a fire burning "under any set of meteorological conditions", and it reduces the spread of the fire, allowing firefighters to construct effective control lines.

And yet there have been recent moves to have controlled burning listed as a "key threatening process" under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Such a submission has reportedly been received by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

In NSW, already, the Department of Environment and Conservation has listed "too frequent fire" as a "key threatening process to biodiversity".

But the real threatening process is the holocaust we have just seen in Victoria.

Last week angry fire survivors in Victoria pointed the finger at local authorities who prevented clearing of vegetation. At a public meeting in Arthurs Creek, Warwick Spooner, who lost his mother and brother in the Strathewen fire, stood up criticise the Nillumbik council.

"We've lost two people in my family because you dickheads won't cut trees down." Then of course, there is Liam Sheahan, the Reedy Creek home owner whose house is the only one in a two-kilometre area which survived the fires. In 2004 he was fined \$50,000 for removing 247 trees around his hilltop house to protect it from fire. His two-year court battle against the Mitchell Shire Council cost him \$50,000 in legal fees.

It is a rich irony that Slidders Lawyers last week launched a class action on behalf of fire victims at Kinglake, against the Singapore-owned electricity company SP AusNet, alleging the fire was caused by a fallen power line.

After all, it was only in 2001 that Transgrid bulldozed a 60-metre wide firebreak under its

high-voltage lines in the Snowy Mountains. For that it was prosecuted by four government agencies, blasted for "environmental vandalism" by the then NSW premier Bob Carr, and fined \$500,000.

Two years later, during the disastrous firestorm that engulfed the mountains, the offending firebreak became the only safe haven for kangaroos and workers constructing a fire trail. The sad truth of such holocausts is that the environmental toll ends up worse than the most vigorous prescribed burning regime ever could be.

Victoria's bushfires have spewed millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere - more than a third of Australia's entire output for a year, according to Sydney University's Professor Mark Adams.

No doubt the royal commission will recommend, like previous inquiries, that prescribed burning should be increased. After so many deaths will anyone listen this time?

devinemiranda@hotmail.com

Almost 24 hours after the firestorm that obliterated Marysville and killed 34 people, Victoria's chief emergency services bureaucrats believed everyone in the town was safe.

In a damning indictment of the communication bumbles on Black Saturday, the bushfires royal commission has heard Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin wasn't even aware of the fire three hours after it had started.

He has conceded there will have to be an overhaul of bushfire policies to prevent a repeat of the February 7 disaster that killed 173 people.

A situation report produced by Mr Esplin's office at 8am (AEST) on the day after the fires, and again at 5pm, stated: "We understand everyone in Marysville is safe and are assembled at Gallipoli Park".

Counsel assisting the commission, Rachel Doyle, told the hearing on Wednesday that the information was "just embarrassingly out of date".

Mr Esplin agreed it was "unfortunate and wrong" but he refused to accept suggestions that authorities had lost control of managing the fires.

This was despite admitting he didn't know about the Murrindindi blaze that destroyed Marysville until "after 6pm" even though it broke out at 3pm.

Pressed about what went wrong on the day, Mr Esplin said: "I think that's a question that will trouble everyone involved in this incident".

He said that at midday on February 7 he believed Victoria had the best bushfire policies in the world but each would now have to be reviewed, including the contentious "stay and defend, or leave early" policy.

But Mr Esplin said he had never favoured forced evacuations because they ran a real risk of causing a "boy who cries wolf scenario".

In almost an entire day of grilling, Mr Esplin was also questioned about the use of town sirens, radio and television emergency signals and automated phone messaging.

The commission was told all had been used or trialled before but none was activated to warn communities about the fires raging towards them on Black Saturday.

Mr Esplin said it had been his view since 2004 that Australia needed a national phone warning system but attempts to push the issue had been thwarted.

The commission saw two letters written by the Victorian government to the Commonwealth in 2007 and 2008 pressing the issue.

It was only on April 30 this year, nearly three months after the fires, that the plan was agreed to.

Mr Esplin said broadcasting emergency sirens on TV and radio was never discussed in the lead-up to Black Saturday.

And he was "not in a position" to say whether they could have been used to warn people, adding that overusing the siren would desensitise people to its importance.

The commission was told Ferny Creek in the Dandenongs was the only town in Victoria with its own fire brigade warning siren, installed after three people perished in the 1997 fires.

Wednesday's hearing also heard that 9,088 triple-zero calls were made on Black Saturday, and that calls during high demand had in the past been diverted to untrained CFA volunteers.

The bushfire information line ran hot and was diverted to Centrelink.

Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Mrs. Helen Bogiatzis
Principal Research Officer

Dear Mrs. Bogiatzis

I had a computer break down after I spoke to you and have not had the time I would have liked to complete a full version of my submission.

Because of that I have decided to include a copy of the correspondence I have been having with both Bryan Cifuentes Area Director Cairns Peninsula and Assistant Commissioner Steve Rothwell.

Please find enclosed

- Copy of the reply to my original request for information about the 'Incident Reports'
- Cover letter and copy of the request for answers and information regarding the management of the Rural Fire Service including the additional part B and C
- Copy of Rothwells first reply
- Copy of my second request
- Copy of Rothwells second reply
- Copy of my third request
- Copy of Rothwells third reply
- Copy of my forth request
- Copy of Rothwells forth reply
- Copy of my fifth request
- Copy of Rothwells fifth reply

These are not page numbered yet I have them in order.

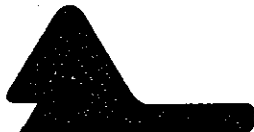
Take note that these are my copyright and have been sent to several people as this is to important to have this hidden behind government laws. They all have the right to add to the document and distribute as they see fit.

Its bad enough that QFRS can cover up and act upon a serious breach of safety procedures that could have resulted in a tragedy

Regards

Michael Fraser
Michael Fraser
Po Box 726
Cooktown QLD 4895

07 4069 5767
18/3/2010



**Queensland
Government**

Queensland Fire and
Rescue Service

Mr Bryan Cifuentes
Mobile: 0407 365 709
Our Ref: QFS/Marton

5th November, 2008

Dear Peter,

I refer to your letter dated 11th September, 2008 regarding further information request on the impost of the fire incident reports on volunteer fire fighters. As mentioned in our discussion on the 4th November I apologise for not replying to you sooner and I accept full responsibility without excuse.

The incident form is not compulsory for volunteers to fill in however the organisation does encourage it because basically should there be an insurance claim on property loss and damage or someone get injured it is a first hand record of the response at the coalface. This information then serves well in follow up to any such request. Whilst some of the information requested may be not relevant to some locations of Queensland geographical areas, it is appreciated if volunteers can input information that they perceive important and leave other areas blank.

The form is a part of a national recording of incidents and the forms the volunteers have is a very short version of the full report, the organisation has tried to minimise the impact on volunteer's time on administration.

I thank you for your time on Tuesday as I gained a better insight of what is happening in your local area and I can assure you our local area office small amount of staff are supporting the local volunteers in the far north.

I have taken your other points we spoke about and will communicate them up the system with your interests at heart.

Yours sincerely \

Bryan Cifuentes
Area Director
Cairns Peninsula

Cairns Peninsula Area
31 Grove Street
Cairns Qld 4870

PO Box 1176 Cairns
Queensland 4870 Australia

Telephone: +617 4039 8240
Facsimile: +617 4039 8647
Website: www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au
Email: rfsnpen@emergency.qld.gov.au

Assistant Commissioner
Rural Fire Service Qld.

Please find enclosed a 13 page document that is my personal opinion about the way the management of the RFS has conducted itself.

It is addressed to you as the face of the RFS

This document is my personal opinion and in no way reflects on the personal life of anyone in the RFS

Please consider the proposals that I put to you and answer all question in your reply.

This has be written over several weeks as I have had time

Regards



Michael Fraser
MRFB
PO Box 726
Cooktown 4895

Mr Steve Rothwell
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations.

Dear Sir

Recently I received a (VLDF) booklet from you and found it amusing that the only information I have ever received from the RFS has been about a new training manual or a revised and updated training manual. The other booklets concern Workplace Health and Safety.

Most people choose to live in remote areas for the lifestyle and a host of other reasons but it makes me wonder whom is the more remote you or us.

You have completely lost touch with the very reason people live in remote areas or small towns and communities and the value people place on rural life and sense of belonging to a small community where if you do not know everyone you at least know of them.

As far as I'm concerned your page two foreword is simply a justification for expanding the work the office staff under you have to do. It's called job creation and security, I'm guessing that you have about 3000 people and rising employed within the management side of the RFS, all it seems, employed on creating new and more elaborate glossy training manuals and enhanced training courses.

I'm also guessing that the budget for this activity regarding the revision and redesigning of the glossy training manuals and courses, then the printing, distribution and re-training of the trainers would require a large percentage of the yearly budget for the RFS and this does not include the wages and salaries of the staff. Correct me if I am wrong.

In December 08 the three RFB's in my area had a combined end of fire season BBQ supplied by Bryan Cifuentes of the RFS Cairns and review about the just finished fire season. I asked one of the QF&R trainers who came up from Cairns about the fact that all the training lectures involved fire modelling were based on the south-east corner and did not relate to the fire type we encounter here. His answer was that we couldn't do training models to suit individual areas and that the courses were only to give a basic understanding of fire fighting. This is not true as we have all completed basic training. The point here is that to understand fire and the way it burns takes a lot more understanding then to simply throw fire model lectures at brigade members based on south east corner situations. Not one of these lectures demonstrated how fires behaved or changed due to different conditions. All the lectures contained were a set of obstacle's that we had to avoid or defend to fight the fire, again based on some fairytale land that exist in the extreme south of the state. Your training lectures are all based on a falsehood, they have to first show how fires burn in the different climate zones then and only then will you be able to produce fire modelling, yet you keep upgrading the training manuals all based on the south-east modelling.

Another trainer during a lecture several years ago stated when I challenged him about the fact that the fire model he had been giving us had no relation to our area or vegetation He said you have to adapt this to your area I ask you what's the point...everyone just walks away shaking their heads and wondering who or what is in control of the RFS. There is a clear need for a full open independent public inquiry into the running of the RFS.

Both these people are paid by you to perform this way under your direction and trained under your order. They are indoctrinated dogma style and do not have or are allowed to have a freethinking mind. The first was a young UNI geek and the latter an older experienced fire fighter.

These are only two examples of where you are going wrong. Rural people are not stupid yet everything coming out of your office seems to point in that direction. There is no mention of rural people having local knowledge about the type of vegetation; lay of the land, wind direction and the way a fire burns in their local area. It proves that your mode of operation excludes the input of the very people who are the rural fire service namely the 'volunteers'. No, the highly paid seat warmers within the RFS refuse to give any credence to the volunteers as to having any knowledge before joining their local fire brigade and that they must be trained only to suit your way that is formulated to suit the south-east corner and therefore must in the eye's of the people at your level be the same wherever one lives within Queensland.

I am not disputing the fact that everyone needs basic training when joining their local brigade. If someone wants to go on and study for the courses which amount to some 30 hours in most cases according to the glossy booklet you so kindly sent out to everyone then they should be paid the same hourly rate as the ancillary staff with the urban brigades.

Now before you start jumping up and down and spilling your coffee all over your desk and computer calm down.

I can tell that you are very good at hiring UNI computer geek's to produce the tons of glossy training manuals and booklets, just look at the spiral bound 100 odd page pocket book that to read you start by going to a page then 30 pages over but on the reverse side etc.

I do believe that even that spiral bound pocket book has been revised and reprinted. *For goodness sake, how many hundreds of hours did that take and how much did it cost*

My you people in head office have made a nice little feather bed for yourselves but it must stop now.

Inquiry called for.

There is a clear need to call for an independent inquiry into the running of the RFS, the type of people that are being employed and the direction that management is taking the service. The inquiry should have the power to get rid of the current management level and create a plan that will lead the RFS into the future and not put all their energy and the resource's that should go to the brigade's into producing glossy training manuals and young trainers who sound like parrots.

The inquiry should look into moving the headquarters and all staff including the commissioner, assistants and all staff to a regional centre. The headquarters should be located on the edge of a regional city located a minimum of say 300k from the Capital City, perhaps even Ipswich, wherever it is decided to move to it must be a rural town surrounded by bushland. This will allow all paid staff from the commissioner down to acquire a personal knowledge of living in rural areas and over time all staff will integrate into the rural lifestyle and because of this location staff will also gain a personal and professional knowledge of how the bush reacts to the changing seasons and climate conditions.

This knowledge cannot be gained by people who sit in a high rise office block in the capital city at the southeast corner of such a vast state that spans several climate zones. City people think like city people and always will as long as they live in the city. City people also think they know how to regulate the way rural people fight fires across this vast state, this is evident when the city management people assume the one size fits all mindset. This city mindset assumes the same conditions that apply in the southeast corner are the same across the state, even in the tropics.

That alone warrants the move of headquarters to a rural area and if the current staff, even the commissioners, do not want to move then that creates a great opportunity to employ people who are dedicated to the RFS and moving the mindset to a rural one instead of a city one.

This is a RURAL FIRE SERVICE not a city-based fire service and city people running a rural fire service just do not work.

If the current staff does not want to move out of the city then it presents the RFS a great opportunity to re-structure with new people who are willing to work and live in the very environment they say they are protecting. Without this move of headquarters to a rural setting the RFS will continue to be the remote part of this service.

The second step the RFS needs to take once the headquarters has moved to a rural area is to divide the state into climate zones. South east and western zone. Mid-eastern zone. North eastern zone Peninsular and northwest area as an example.

A complete reorganisation of the divisional area offices.

Each divisional office would be required to research the vegetation types in the individual brigade's areas within the zone. This research will include when the fire season starts in each area. Wind strength and how fire burns in that region.

This will also allow the divisional staff to take an active part with the local brigades with public education when the fire season starts and can assist by putting adverts in local papers stating when it is safe to burn-off according to local conditions. The divisional staff will have to work closely with the local brigades to make this work, as someone living in Cairns and only spends a couple of days in the northern peninsular area each summer cannot predict nor gauge how the climate conditions are day to day. The same as staff in Brisbane cannot use the climate in the south east corner as being the standard to fit all the state. Another reason to move the headquarters to a rural area and out of the REMOTE south east corner.

The inquiry should also look into creating a board of management that would include two members from each climate zone and two members of management. This board would set the agenda and direction of the RFS. The two members from the climate zones are to be elected from amongst the rural brigades.

Each climate zone would also have a management board elected from within the areas brigades along with the current area directors giving the volunteers as much say as the directors into the running of the brigades.

The rural situated headquarters could become a leading research and development centre for developing new and best practice in fire fighting involving local knowledge within each climate zone along with new and innovative fire trucks suited to those different climate zones. Included in this research will be map making and clothing improvements to name a few.

City people with city mindsets can never fully understand the bush. This move will be strongly resisted by the current management but will have to be made. Bring up the points that they need to be in the city to be close to all the services will not count as all those can be sourced in the towns, what will have to be looked at is the psychological reasons why they do not want to move.

Below is a list of things that you have never put any effort into. First I will remind you that this is not for you to run with and make out that all of a sudden that you have come up with a lot of new ideas. It is quite obvious that you and the other management level types have not got a clue. This is

to let you know that you have let the ball drop and it has roiled out of your reach. Just sip your coffee and check the job adds for your next position

List of things that the management of the RFS does not think they need to do.

- Enhance the research and development section. *In the six years I have been a member of MRFB there has not been any improvement to the equipment supplied in that time. It's very obvious this should be the most important section. Far more money and time needs to be injected into R&D then producing glossy manuals. Another reason for you and the rest of the management level to start looking for new jobs. Safety we all understand yet without continual improvements to the trucks and equipment all the training in the world will not save you.*
- Create a simple form for lodging equipment levy submissions to council for inclusion on the brigade areas rates notice. *At the moment it takes several hours to complete the requirements of the local council. The only thing you offer in the way of help is a one/three year budget example. This is another area you have totally neglected believe you have never looked at this. Glossy training booklets and training courses YES! Creating catch phrases is your game such as 'Paramount Safety'*
- Formulate clear guidelines for council's to accept the submissions. *Over the last five years we (MRFB) have had several run-ins with Cook Shire Council over this levy. They require a three-year budget that must not have any money left over. One year they would not include the levy on the rates notice because we had \$1700 left over from the year before. They also withhold the levy money for reasons as yet not explained, the levy they collected in March 08' has as yet (January) not been paid to us and we now are into 09'. There is much more to this story then I have related here.*
- Equipment levy *As we have to save at least \$20,000 towards a replacement truck (I have been told this might be changed in the future) what right has the local council got to refuse to impose the levy on the rateable lots in our brigade zone because we had saved some money from the year before. The levy is the only income to support the fire truck and shed. Up until recently we had 78 rateable lots, this has been raised since our area was expanded but would still be under 100 even at 100 that would only raise \$2500. Do you have any idea how much it costs to run the truck What happens when the truck has to have several tires replaced and a major service done, perhaps the Honda fire fighter pump might have to be replaced At a guess I'd say you have no idea*
- Send a yearly request to every brigade asking for information as to what needs to be improved on the fire truck. *The same thing is happening in this area as with the training methods based on the south east corner. What works down south does not always work the same in the tropics. For a start I have asked the Cairns regional office if they can supply a steel bull bar for our truck instead of the plastic thing that you think is the best to equip the trucks with. Bryan Cifuentes of Cairns has come back with some info that the new trucks are being fitted with alloy bars and he would see if he could get us one. All this takes too long, we have had the truck for 6yrs and up until now everyone has been to afraid to ask for the truck to be improved and with the direction that you and the rest of the management level are taking the RFS I can see why but from now on that is going to change. The trucks have far too much plastic on them for a start. The trucks are fitted with a hand primer pump that even the UNI geek from Cairns admitted that the*

rubber in the pump deteriorates over the off season. 1. Replace the plastic bull bar with a steel one 2. Remove all the plastic from the outside of the trucks 3. Move the drippers and fit a Honda transfer pump to use when filling the tank. 4. Develop a fitting that is part of the foot valve to float it above the mud. 5. Develop a way of charging the battery for the Honda fire fighter pump what's the point of supplying a 24 volt truck with a 12volt battery for the pump and have it go flat all the time. A battery can only be charged so many times.

The latest trucks are the same as the one we received 6 years ago so how can you claim that they are "state of the art". They are supplied with a Honda fire fighter pump rigged to be used as a transfer pump as well. This is simply a cost saving exercise and has nothing to do with supplying the volunteers with the best options.

The time difference to refill the fire truck tank using the current setup compared to using a separate transfer pump fitted to the truck would be astounding. The reason you are not putting the best gear on the trucks is that you need more money to run your high-end office.

Another new scheme you have come up with is to leave the trucks painted white. This is claimed by your office will save head office \$3,000 per truck. This is not being done for "paramount safety" reasons but so you have more money to run the office.

Another item is the water container mounted on the right hand side just behind the driver. I believe this is placed there for drinking water. Even a school kid knows not to leave a container of drinking water out in the sun. One of the main problems of fire fighting is dehydration and this is all your mob can come up with. A container of hot water. Well done! There is not much more to say on this except it shows that the RFS does not respect the volunteers.

This is a clear example of the neglect you and the manage level have excelled in. You should all hang your heads down in shame.

If R&D were doing what they should be doing I would not have anything on this list. The most dangerous safety item of all is the helmet, goggles and facemask. Not one of these items has been improved in the last 6 years. I defy you to wear them for an hour in a fire on a hot day and see if you can keep them on your head. Try wearing them in your plush office for an hour with the two elastic straps for the face mask over your head then the single strap for the red eye goggles then put the helmet on over all that. The goggles get in the way of the mask the helmet pushes down on the goggles and it all becomes a hassle to wear.

You take it on yourselves to claim that safety training is PARAMOUNT yet in all these years you have neglected this vital area. If the fire fighter is under stress because of the inadequate safety apparel then how can any training help wear the headgear yourself before you even comment on this subject. If you respond to me about the headgear without wearing the gear for an hour then you will have crossed the line of trust and honesty.

- Fire breaks *Develop clear specifications and guidelines for councils and other agencies when grading fire breaks. CSC scrapes the overburden from the centre of the break to the outside of the break. This creates a high mound of dirt and grass up to a meter high on each side of the break. Where this happens on the wind side the fire racing to the mound with the now dry grass in it will and does allow the fire to jump the firebreak. The guidelines should also instruct the grader operator to avoid going too deep and creating deep erosion ruts*

- Fire breaks *Develop easy access to funding for council so they can get the fire breaks done at the right time of the year. At the moment Cook Shire Council will not clear the existing or create new fire breaks unless they can find funding. By the time this comes through the grass has grown to full height and in fact takes them longer to clear the breaks then if they had started when first asked. Council is never very quick to act when asked. This also has the added hazard of building up the overburden along the sides of the cleared break with the potential to allow the fire to jump the break.*

Safety as always is the priority yet again you have neglected the far more important area of prevention. The more pre-season hazard reduction and preventative work done the less danger during the fire season.

- Climate and Vegetation *this area is a complete missing section within your direction of operational criteria. It has a big bearing on the way fire burns. Sending young UNI people out to train rural area volunteers with fire models based on the south east corner amounts to arrogance beyond belief. Once the RFS has been moved to a regional area this is one more thing to add to the list of new things to do. With the state divided into climate zones the area divisions should then be engaged in studying the different vegetation and climates within their zones.*

Example 1, do trees in the tropics have the same amount of oil in their leaves. 2 does fire runs across the top of trees or along the ground. When is the fire season in the far north? What significant thing occurs to the vegetation during the summer? These questions make all the difference when each rural brigade approaches a fire. I can also see a whole new area of research and hundreds of questions relating to this study.

WHY ARE YOU NOT DOING ANY OF THIS AND CHANGING THE FOCUS OF THE RFS FROM ONE OF 'WE KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU' TO ONE OF 'WE SUPPORT YOU'.

This will then help divisional staff understand the conditions the local brigades deal with during their fire season and can then help with any modifications the brigades need to their equipment

What will happen out of this will be that the so-called trainers will come to learn from the local brigades on how to fight the fire in that particular area instead of coming to them and dictating how it is done in the south-east corner and that is the only way every regional brigade should fight a fire.

The neglect of research into fire behaviour in the different climate zones within Qld is astounding to say the least.

- Pre-season hazard reduction *At this time we get no help from you regarding informing the residents in our area of what to do to fire proof their properties. Again our fire season is different to the south east corner yet there is never any glossy material from you that can be issued to the residents? Just glossy training manuals*
- Social change of rural lifestyle blocks. *Over the last few years the makeup of the population of the bush has changed with the growth of the sea/tree change era. This has resulted with an influx of city people moving to lifestyle small acreage blocks. Most of these people clear only a house site with the bush coming right up to the building. The only*

experience of fire for most of them has been the news on TV; they have no idea about creating fire breaks around their houses or around the boundary of their blocks.

This lack of knowledge of fire prevention is not limited to new arrivals, as most of the long-term locals will not fire proof their own blocks. This has the affect of impacting on the rural brigades ability to put fires out quickly because of the lack of fire breaks resulting in the firefighters having to back burn around each building and have the fire burn back to itself rather than fight the actual fire.

- New members There is a complete lack of support from you when it comes to encouraging new members to join their local rural fire brigade. Why is it so hard to recruit new members
- Maps *Perhaps you think that the maps you send out are 'state of the art'. Wrong! School kids could produce a far better result. In fact there is more detail in the local tourist map then on the one you supply. The map should clearly show all rural property boundaries, dams, fire breaks, lanes, roads, houses etc. The roads should not be just a red line.*

Come on, lift your game, and use your time in this position to really improve the structure of the RFS. Don't waste this chance.

- Hand held Radio this is another area where not one second of thought has been given. They should all be supplied as a hands free unit as it is almost impossible to use them under fire conditions when wearing gloves and trying to press the talk button. The radio has to be put in a pocket with the flap closed to prevent it from falling out. This all takes time when calling for help or backup.
- Community *From the glossy booklets and other contact I have had with paid employee's of the RFS it is totally clear that you and the rest of the staff do not have any idea about rural living. Nor do I think that you have ever done a study into the way of life we live. It is also clear that you think that one-size fits all that whatever works in the southeast corner will also work the same way in the tropics. A study like this will help define the way you go about dealing with rural people. Without knowing the rural way of life how do you ever expect to be able to work with us? This is obvious when the only thing you do well is spend millions designing printing and distributing glossy training books and manuals all based on the south east corner then when that's done revise the glossy booklets and reprint them again and again. How many millions has been waisted doing this.*

Mr Steve Rothwell, the first sentence of your foreword states

"Fire fighting is a hazardous job and there are many risks involved in protecting your community against fire. Safety for the nearly 40,000 Rural Fire Service Volunteers, who are the front line between fire and families across Queensland, is paramount."

Well 'Steve' you have got that wrong, we are not doing this to protect our communities from fire. We are doing it to save our homes and property *from* fire. That is after the fire has started, not before the fire has started which is what we have trained for.

Safety is Paramount

The millions you have spent researching, designing and printing the glossy booklets, training manuals and other aids to help with the training courses that you claim are aimed at new volunteers has completely missed the point... how many new members do you hope to attract to the local brigades. I've stated before we have in the last twelve months had only one new person join. This person is a full time employed worker, work out yourself what that means, *if you can that is*.

You state in the sentence above that there are nearly 40,000 volunteers I ask you this question.... *How many new volunteers do you expect to attract in the near future to justify the millions spent on this new training regime? With that many volunteers what is the ratio of eligible rural people available. Do you expects to have everyone join to make this training work.*

The only way I can see you doing it is to attract young people who do not even have any life experience.

The last part of your sentence states that the volunteers are the front line between families and fire, *so you think that is the paramount point that is the catalyst to spending the millions on this new training regime.*

Paramount Safety

If you think that training is the only safety measure then God help all us volunteers. It looks like the leadership of the RFS abandons the volunteers once they receive their trucks and safety gear, after that if any thing needs to be changed or remodelled they need to do it themselves. Even to the fire model training lectures that are based on the southeast corner where we are told to adjust it to suit your own area because the leadership of the RFS cannot produce several different models to suit the different climates of the state nor allow the lecturers to have the right to individualise the module to suit a regional area.

To many glossy training booklets and manuals to produce. Then you have to retrain the trainers.
Well done

There is also page two with the introduction....

"QFRS rural operations has embarked on a series of reforms over recent years."

Another reason for the inquiry to be called.

For such an important decision there has never been any contact with the rural brigades. This is another example of how the city dwelling city minded current management have totally dismissed and negated any involvement and input from the rural volunteers who make-up the fire fighting work force

Such important changes to the operational running of the RFS should be explained beforehand to the rural brigades and allow them to vote if the changes are acceptable. The current way the changes have taken place are only suitable to enhancing the continuing job security of the current management and has nothing to do with supporting the rural fire brigades.

This is another reason why the headquarters of the RFS need to move to a rural area immediately. The fact that the management has not decided to include the members of the brigades creates a 'US AND THEM' situation where the paperboys who live in the city claim to have superior knowledge

of rural fire fighting and that the volunteers do not have the right to know or have a say into the running of the RFS.

Another reason for a public inquiry.

The rural brigade members have a unique and invaluable knowledge of the bush in their local area and it seems that the current management does not want to include this knowledge or have them involved in the decision making.

It seems that you do not think that being prepared is necessary

You have put all your eggs into one basket and to justify this and keep your (and the others involved in the planning of the policy) position within the RFS and hold on to the big salaries, you have pushed everything else to the back or could it be that you have not considered anything else.

When a new owner of a rural property takes possession they are not given any information as to how to prepare for fire from council or the RFS

We get all the glossy booklets about training but there is not one thing from you to hand out to landowners about the responsibility that have to be fire prepared.

Most landowners get a permit to burn off when they feel like it, usually at the end of the low temp period or during the high temp danger period. There is not a scheduled notifiable low-temp burn-off period available to the landowner. No guidelines are available through local council offices or from local rural brigades or wardens. We generally do not find out about a burn-off until they have got out of control.

The recent fires in SA (around 12Th Jan 09) where it has been stated by the Rural Fire fighters that the reason that they lost several tuna sheds was because there has never been any vegetation clearing between the sheds and the bush.

During our own major fire in November 08 where we do not have many cleared fire breaks, one owner, as the fire raced across his land towards his house quickly scraped a fire break across the fire front which stopped the fire and allowed the fire fighters to save the house.

I have been campaigning in my brigade that all landowners should clear a firebreak around their fence lines but it falls on deaf ears.

Being prepared and clearing fire breaks not only contains fires but allows the local RFB to drive around the boundaries and restrict the fire from crossing and aid with back burning.

Areas that you have totally neglected

Safety has to encompass everything from the

Pre-season hazard reduction burns.

Creation of new and clearing of existing fire breaks by council.

Remind residents that permits are required for all fires at the right time in each area

Advertise the correct time to light hazard reduction burns

Advertise the high fire danger time in local areas

Remind owner-occupiers that it is there responsibility to maintain a firebreak around their homes and boundaries.

Continually improve the design and equipment on the fire trucks

When requested by individual brigades, modify fire trucks to suit local conditions
Continually improve the safety apparel supplied to rural fire fighters
Local Radio coverage CB/UHF
Equipment levy lodgement with council
Clear guidelines for building fire breaks
Information for new owners regarding fire protection
Explain why the equipment levy is on the rate notice. It is not a fee for service
Enhance the R&D section

Other areas where we are left totally in the dark is what lawful rights we have when entering private land when a fire is burning. I will not go into this, as there is too many areas that you do not cover and do not send out to the brigades in the form of glossy booklets. No money left to do it?

Good ideas and good management are hard to find. The people in the field offices are not responsible; they only work from directions that come from head office.

Regards



Michael Fraser
Marton Rural Fire Brigade
PO Box 726
Cooktown QLD 4895

PS. since completing this doc these last items need adding
Our local council has sent out the rates notices for the first six months of 09' and have included a one page letter titled "Fire in Cook Shire". This was inserted by Bryan Cifuentes because of our (the volunteers in this area) concerns that the rural residents do not have or receive any information about making their properties fire safe. Unfortunately it is not what is needed. It has it uses at the same by having a list of all the shire fire wardens and a small story about the rural fire volunteers.

I went into the local shire council office in Cooktown to look for information that relates to fire and there is none. *Nothing from the RFS or council.* Any tree changes new to the rural lifestyle have no easy access to information about fire.

Again I state that the leadership of the RFS is totally negligent in putting all the millions of dollars into training booklets only.

Prevention and preparation before a fire is very effective in preventing loss of house and sheds yet you do not consider this important.

Good example of this is the fires in Vic where the power lines were in danger and the CFS were madly bulldozing firebreaks. Clean firebreaks can and do stop a fire yet these are done at the time a fire is roaring toward infrastructure. It seems to be too much trouble to be prepared and have fire breaks built and maintained.

I really think the only way to sort this out is to call for an independent public inquiry into the management, direction and future of the Rural Fire Service.

The original question I asked for information about still has not been answered. In September I requested a copy of the information gained from the incident form including new modelling,

statistics and analysis compiled from the reports. I have been told that you do not have a report completed yet. WHY NOT?

How long do I have to wait till your office people get around to this? How long do the rural residents have to wait until the RFS becomes a fully operational multi-function operation that is focused on the rural fire brigades and not on enlarging the importance of the head office staff. You are there to supply the latest and most advanced equipment and support the volunteers in the different climate zones in this vast state.

The RFS management should be the link between the local rural brigades and the government who supply the funds and not some city based out of touch organisation seeking power and social status.

A full employment tree should be included in your reply showing position of each employee from the commissioner down. The list should show what if any experience the staff has as active fire fighters. Do you advertise the positions within the rural brigades or just in the city?

Finally in conclusion. This report on the running of the RFS could run to more than a hundred pages if I went to the trouble of fleshing out each section, yet I think as it stands anyone with half a brain can see that the RFS is a troubled organisation.

The staff at the regional offices are restrained by policies put in place by headquarters and have very little knowledge of what is really happening at the brigade level and can only offer as a way of help the training courses supplied by headquarters, which have if the truth be known been taken from some obscure USA program.

This also applies to headquarters as without information about local knowledge, design faults in the trucks and equipment, problems with lodging equipment levy's with councils, councils not handing over the funds collected and all the items I have already mentioned in this report the management just goes on its merry way producing training manuals, creating power levels within local volunteer /community brigade members. Without listening and responding to the very people who are the active part of the RFS and not simply thinking of them as volunteers the RFS will never improve. The management being without experience and cities based are so remote from the real practicalities of fire fighting they actually put the volunteer fire fighters at extreme risk.

This is clearly evident in the latest edition of the R F Bulletin (March 09) in which is featured a story under *safety matters* titled sharing the learning. Great words, "sharing the learning". Let's look at this story as it embodies all that is wrong with the direction management is taking the RFS. The story states under contributing factors three points...1. Type of fuel.... 2.no recent fire activity.... 3. Inexperienced crew...followed with RFS recommended risk measures.... 1.update training...2. De-brief brigade about risk...followed with ... this should be taken as a near miss and the RFS will publish more lessons learnt from near miss incidents. This story is finished with the following...

"REMEMBER – A NEAR MISS IS A GOLDEN OPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS RISKS BEFORE THEY RESULT IN AN INJURY."

I ask you this, does this apply to the person who, when using a hammer to hit a nail and just misses his finger or to the person who almost has a car crash or almost gets hit by lightning or almost gets mugged, on and on and so forth.

Yet all you can come up with is more training to prevent even the near miss. Prohibition did not work, drug laws do not stop their use, all the road rules do not stop people dying on the roads, no

legislation yet has stopped people from killing others. My point here is that all the extra training in the world will not eliminate risk or the near miss

The glaring point about this story in the bulletin fully places the blame on the brigade and the volunteers; it also mentions the damage to the truck from heat and flames to the plastic on the truck. I wonder if the management of the RFS at all levels will ever except responsibility for the equipment supplied and lack of continuing research and development to improve said equipment. There is no mention about the fire situation around the truck nor wind conditions.

I have mentioned about the amount of plastic on the trucks already in this report and when this is mentioned to regional office staff they reverse the blame by saying, "you must be to close". I will repeat the management of the RFS, by supplying trucks with so much outside plastic is putting the truck and volunteers in extreme danger.

The management by not developing a system of plumbing the truck with piping to fit mist sprays on the front, sides and back that are controlled with switches in the cab by the driver. This could also be extended to fit a swing out gun setup that the driver could use when there is only two crew available at the time of a call out.

There is a continual never ending response from the RFS that continually upgrading training and not looking at other safety developments is always going to place the volunteers in danger and will result in the deaths of the already well trained volunteers.

You should all bow your heads in shame at this direction you have taken the RFS. Safety is not just the volunteer's responsibility, it is yours to research and develop the best most up to date equipment in the world.

I have been informed that Cook Shire Council has finally handed over the levy funds they collected in March 08' almost one year after it was collected. As mentioned earlier in this report what right has the council to withhold this money. Again I ask where is the management on this problem, I don't think you have any idea that this is happening because all your focus is on producing training programs. SHAME ON YOU.

MRFB has around 80 rateable blocks and as such we bring in around \$2000, the running cost of the truck last year was around \$1500 what is left is not much of a backstop if something major happens to the truck. I have also mentioned this elsewhere in this report. In all your glossy booklets there is nothing mentioned about the running costs. Another area where the management has lost the ball. To use a 'wet stuff on the red stuff' you can not see the ' fire for the training stuff '

In the bulletin the far nth region update mentions that they welcome new RFBAQ district rep's namely John Thomson. I would like to know who nominated him and who voted for him. I ask this in response to a question I have asked of the regional office to have the plastic bull bar on the truck replaced with a steel one...when I asked him about getting the steel bull bar his answer was..."weld it yourselves it cost me only \$50 to make one for my Toyota" this was from your new rep, it's a joke that someone so irresponsible can hold such a position.

Another question.... Regarding the running of the local brigade.... The secretary, treasurer and 1st officer claim that they are the whole committee and as such (they get this from a manual of yours) they can have secret private meetings without the knowledge of the other members. This is an absurd situation as we only have about 10 active members. This creates a clique, as they do not involve the other members. All mail is kept from the rest of us, the only reason I received the latest March 09 bulletin is I have requested information to be sent to me as well as not one of the previous

bulletins nor anything from the RFS has been shared with the rest of us. What you have in the manual regarding needs to be totally revised as small brigades need separate guidelines as to the make up of the committee. To stop a clique developing the committee must be made of those three plus of other brigade members to make a quorum of at least 5 or 7, this will stop a power group developing and everyone will know what is going on. They should not be allowed to meet and make decisions that will affect the rest without allowing everyone to respond. Even local shire councillors have legislation stating that once they receive the agenda for the upcoming meeting they are not allowed to have informal pre-meetings to discuss the items on the agenda and so it should be for a rural brigade. We are a community-based group and there should not be a separate power group controlling it.

The point here is that the secretary, treasurer or first officer might not be the best person to do the negotiating with outside contacts

When the AGM is held the treasurer gives a verbal account of the financial report and has never had a printed version to hand out. This should be made mandatory that a copy of the financial report be given out to those present. It should include money incoming from all sources including donations. The donations should state the donor and the amount. The expenses should state the cheque number, date, amount and the reason (tyres, fuel, labour, etc) this will stop the misuse of brigade funds and allow members to be aware of the financial position.

I again refer to your 'VLDF' booklet where you state that the volunteers are the front line against fire. This is simply not true...They are the last line of defence against fire.

To base your safety/training program, in fact the whole direction of the RFS on this premise is placing the fireman along with rural residents and infrastructure in danger every time there is a fire.

We, the volunteer fire fighters are the last line of defence, as we do not have anything to do with a fire until we are called out to fight the fire.

The VIC government has now placed further costs on homebuilders by adopting strict building codes within different fire zones. This again is adopting the last line of defence as the first line as you have.

The houses that were saved by fire preventive measures in the recent VIC fires by individual owners at times incurring heavy fines from local councils, is small in number and shows that preventive measures work. It does not matter what the house is built out of for that matter. One house saved because of fire preparative measures was built out of timber logs.

These fire preparation measures are the true 'first line of defence' and should be done first before placing the burden on the rural residents. Clearing around the house, installing sprinklers on roofs and around the house yards also should be considered as well. Council clearing and maintaining rural firebreaks and tracks is a start.

The biggest hinder to implementing these fire preparation/prevention measures includes green groups, local, state and federal government policy and city based Rural Fire Service management.

Prevention has to replace defence as the first line of defence.

As you (as the RFS) have placed yourselves above the rural residents and adopted the last line of defence as the first line, it is no wonder that you have had to push training/safety as paramount without first looking at prevention have left you with no where to move. I've mentioned before there

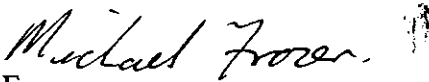
is no information put out by you to residents about preventative action that can and should be undertaken by rural land/house owners and local councils.

A move to the bush of the head office with new research facilities would bring about a complete restructure of the RFS and the study of fire could become a world leading initiative.

You also state on the second page about restructuring over several years. This has been done without consulting with the rural brigade volunteers. A clear indication of empire building rather than becoming closer to the rural brigades and including them in the decision making as to what the RFS should become. Again you have placed yourselves above the rural people including the use of the local knowledge they gain from living in their local area for years, something you seem to think has no bearing on fire fighting or fire prevention.

The above is my personal opinion and in no way reflects on the personal life of anyone mentioned nor is the above work supported by any member of the volunteer fire brigade I am a member of. It is totally my own work and an independent personal assessment of the Rural Fire Service.

Regards



Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
Cooktown QLD 4895
07 4069 5767

PART B

You made this statement below in your first reply to me, in my second request I asked for answers to several questions relating to this '*needs of the community*' statement. This part 'B' is to further make that request clear.

- "Constantly seeking to improve and change to meet 'the needs of the community'".

Does not my request for answers come under this very thing 'needs of the community'?

Questions about 'the needs of the community'

- What modelling and criteria do you use to 'meet the needs of the community'?
- Where do you get the information?
- Was the community invited to comment?
- Were the **volunteers** invited to comment?
- If not why were the **volunteers** omitted from contributing?
- Was it only an in house determination?
- Provide all information you used to determinate 'the needs of the community'?

VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU SUPPLY ALL RESEARCH INTO 'THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY'

- Audit Office Recommendations.

Questions about the recommendations contained in the report

- Supply current recommendations being implemented
- Supply what further recommendations and the time frame for their implementations
- Your Personal information.
- What military experience you have
- How long have you been Assistant Commissioner rural operations
- What is 'AFSM'
- What if any is your wildfire fighting experience
- What training have you completed?
- Which rural brigade are you a current active member of?

Part C

In your third reply where you again refuse to answer any of the issues I have raised you have listed some Rural Operations 2009/2010' budget spending. A result of that brief budget statement is that I now require a full copy of your Rural Operations budget for 2009/2010.

Include all money allocated to reduction burns and the actual money spent on reduction burns. Also include the amount allocated to the far north this year compared to 08'. In fact include the number of pre-season burns completed across the state during 09' compared to 08' and the budget allocated for each year and the actual money spent.

The above questions are a direct result of a news interview given by the Qld Minister for Emergency Services when asked about the lack of hazard reduction early season burns. He stated that he couldn't override the QFRS, as they are the FIRE EXPERTS.

The news interview was held in response to several communities raising questions about the lack of pre-season burns. Two major questions arise from this

1. How many pre-season burns were completed and how much money was used. The questions I have asked about the budget should cover this except a full explanation of the reasons the amount of pre-season burns was reduced will also be required.
2. A full explanation of the "Fire Experts" term used by the minister. By this I require the meaning of the statement. In my opinion an expert is someone who not only has an education but also has a vast amount of personal actual experience in his or her field of endeavour. Becoming an expert goes beyond simply working in the headquarters of the QFRS, calling it Rural Operations and claiming that you are THE experts and THE authority. Paper trained office staff are just that, they have no actual experience to base decisions on. They can only decide how much money to allocate.
3. The above question are very important and must be answered.

Due to the assist commissioner's insistence of controlling inter-action between rural operations and rural fire service volunteers the plan I have put forward to move the headquarters to a rural setting needs some fine-tuning.

I now believe, due to the population growth and development within the area covering the south east/west zones that both those areas need to be separated from the rural sector and placed within the urban QFRS service and create a combined urban/rural operation. The current city based Rural Operations to be combined with the south east/west urban units. As all training models are designed around the fire fighting methods of that area along with the volunteers and headquarters staff all living/working in and around the major populated areas there would be very little reshuffling of the management level required.

The city minded city living non-rural staff in control of the rural operations headquarters in Brisbane would not be disrupted by moving to a new rural headquarters. The army style 'chain of command' currently being introduced by the assist commissioner would fit easily into a combined urban/rural fire brigade design.

Of course a new logo and name would have to be designed for this combined service with reference to the rural fire service dropped.

This will allow the Rural Fire Service to separate and become a true Rural based service separate from city based operations with new headquarters situated on the outskirts of a centrally located town/city away from the south east corner and the remote capital city.

The new RFS would acquire enough land on the edge of the town selected to build the new RFS headquarters. The new RFS headquarters would then be truly rural with all staff living and working in the country away from the city. They would have a better understanding of rural life and conditions. In fact most of the staff could/would have actual **rural fire fighting experience**. This will give the administration a better understanding of the needs of the rural brigades and also be more aware of the rural lifestyle. All the previous mentioned changes I have cited earlier in this document would then be able to be put in place.

The Rural Fire Service would be run by a separate body and not controlled by the new city based South east/west corner operation.

Recently a research program has begun to look into dehydration of volunteers during a bushfire. Take note that I have a section on the drinking water situation on fire trucks supplied by you within the original questions. It is good to see that some other people are starting to think and ask questions. It's all about asking questions, research and then making improvements.

This is your chance to do just that.

The following is a copy of Assistant Commissioner Rothwell's
First reply

He states that the organization is constantly seeking to improve and change to meet 'the needs of the community

I have asked for more information on that statement, so far I have not received any.

The information days stated....which I did indeed attend...did not cover 'needs of the community'

After receiving my first request for information Rothwell copied and sent a copy to the Cairns office and the staff there all read the copy.

The meeting in December 2008 was our end of season BBQ attended by Bryan Cifuentes where we did have a group discussion about that years fire season. Contrary to Rothwell's ideas this is not the appropriate forums to views as they get out of hand and everyone is trying to talk over the top of each other.

There needs to be a clear channel to the Assistant Commissioner to discuss concerns.



**Queensland
Government**

**Queensland Fire and
Rescue Service**

Our Ref: 09/04080

16 April 2009

Mr Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
COOKTOWN QLD 4895

Dear Mr Fraser

Thank you for your letter received on 18 March 2009 regarding various Rural Fire Service matters.

Your personal observations and comments contained in your letter are noted.

The Rural Fire Service like many organisations is constantly seeking to improve and change to meet the needs of the community. To assist our volunteers with change in the organisation, a series of information days were held across the region and I am aware that you attended a rural fire brigade information day at Cooktown on 4 April 2009. Meetings such as this and the one you attended in December 2008 are the appropriate forums to raise your views and have open discussions about matters pertaining to the Rural Fire Service.

I trust that the information day has assisted you with many of your issues, and should you have further concerns please raise these through the appropriate chain of command. In the first instance, you should approach your First Officer, and if he is unable to answer your questions, then Inspector Bryan Cifuentes, Area Director, Cairns, on telephone number 4039 8243 will be able to answer any further queries.

Yours sincerely

Steve Rothwell AFSM
**Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations**



Emergency Services Complex
Cnr Kedron Park Road and Park Road
Kedron Queensland

GPO Box 1425 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia

Telephone +61 7 3247 8130
Facsimile +61 7 3247 8123
Website www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au

ABN 93 035 163 778

Copy of my second request for answers to my questions

Mr Steve Rothwell
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations

Mr Rothwell

Received your short reply to my request for information and answer's to my many concerns about the management, direction and future of the RFS.

In your short note your contempt clearly comes across...HOW DARE A LOWLY RURAL FIRE BRIGADE VOLUNTEER QUESTION THE HEAD OF THE RURAL FIRE SERVICE...as far as I remember the Bjelke-Petersen era is long over.

You state that the RFS like many organisations is constantly seeking to improve and change to meet the needs of the community.

That very statement clearly shows that you are out of touch and are only seeking to secure the long term security of your position. The needs of the community.....if you do not include the community in that process how can you meet the needs of the community. You go on to state that you have organised a series of information days to inform rural fire brigades about the changes you have made to the RFS. At no stage have you ever requested submissions from the volunteers or public when formulating these changes nor have you ever put any of the changes you want to make to the volunteers to vote them in or out. The changes you make are made in secret and have excluded any input by the very people who are the real RFS, the volunteers who fight the fires.

This has added an additional question you need to answer along with your answers to the full submission included.....*What modeling and criteria do you use to 'meet the needs of the community' ? where do you get the information ? Was the community invited to comment ? Was it an in house determination ? Provide all information you used to determinate 'the needs of the community' ?*

Regarding appropriate forums..... First Officers are just that, they do not have the right to make statements on your behalf nor do they know anymore about what goes on within the management of the RFS then the rest of the volunteers. The concerns that I have raised in the submission I am re-posting to you are affecting the RFB's and have been raised at every meeting that I have attended both formal and informal and not just by me. Everyone (the volunteers) at these meetings have many points of concern that they bring up. The Cairns area director is well aware of the concerns and I have had many meetings and discussions with him.

The Cairns Area Office can only respond with answers that conform with edits from your office and again cannot speak on your behalf. All we do is go over and around the same problems and get no where and I want that changed. Put it down to your "the needs of the community" statement.

I have simply noted the concerns of others and added my own to this submission that you have read and chose not to respond to. It will do you good to answer all the concerns I have put to you including the proposal to move the headquarters to a rural situation. Many of the questions concern published statements you have made and no one other then you can answer questions about those statements. If you are prepared to make statements then you should be prepared to answer questions about those statements.

I love the secondary and underlying tone that you have implied in your short note, unfortunately schoolboy bullying will not work with me. Never has and never will.

There is over 7700 words in my submission I expect that you will have to use ten times that many to fully answer all the concerns I have put to you. It took you one month to reply the first time so I give you the same time to complete this second chance. Very few people get a second chance to fix a mistake they have made.

You are the only appropriate forum to put questions regarding the management of the RFS.

Questions not answered will be resubmitted to you until they are !

Regards



Michael Fraser
Volunteer Firefighter.
PO Box 726
Cooktown QLD 4895

Copy of Assistant Commissioners second reply

Note here that he states that to supply the answers and information I have requested would 'unreasonably divert Rural Operations resources from their use in the performance of key functions.

I gather from this that Rothwell is unable to answer questions and has to ask his office staff to do this.

I wonder what Rothwell does do while in his office.



Queensland
Government

Queensland Fire and
Rescue Service

Our Ref: 09/05873

20 May 2009

Mr Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
COOKTOWN QLD 4895

Dear Mr Fraser

Thank you for your further letter received on 6 May 2009 regarding various Rural Fire Service matters.

In your letter, you request that I provide a lengthy response to all of the issues that you have raised in relation to your personal beliefs as to how the Rural Fire Service should be operating and managed. I am unable to provide you with individual responses to each of the issues raised in your correspondence, given that this would substantially and unreasonably divert Rural Operations resources from their use in the performance of key functions.

Your personal opinions are noted and while I appreciate your efforts in writing to me, as previously advised in my letter dated 16 April 2009, Inspector Bryan Cifuentes is able to discuss your queries and concerns with you at the local level and he is in a position to respond on my behalf. If Inspector Cifuentes is not able to provide you with an immediate response to a certain matter, then providing it is reasonable and time constraints permit, he will make further queries and ensure that a response is provided to you as soon as practicable.

In relation to your suggestion for an independent inquiry into the running of the Rural Fire Service, I am able to inform you that last year, the Queensland Audit Office undertook a performance management systems audit of the systems and frameworks that support the Rural Fire Service. The primary objective of the audit was to determine whether suitable systems are operating to ensure the efficient and effective management of rural fires, including whether rural fire brigades are adequately resourced. The Audit Report, which made various recommendations, was tabled in the House on 15 May 2008. Recommendations contained in the Audit Report are currently being progressed by Rural Operations.



Emergency Services Complex
Cnr Kedron Park Road and Park Road
Kedron Queensland

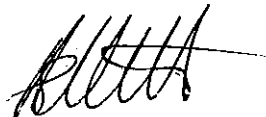
GPO Box 1425 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia

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Facsimile +61 7 3247 8123
Website www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au

ABN 93 035 163 778

If you have any further queries, please contact Inspector Bryan Cifuentes, Area Director, Cairns, Rural Operations on telephone number 4039 8243.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Rothwell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations

Copy of my third request
For answers and information
Regarding the management of the Rural Fire Service

ATTENTION MR ROTHWELL
Third Request for information

Dear Mr Rothwell AFSM

Another wonderful day in paradise and the recent rain has pushed the beginning of the fire season back a bit longer, so alls well and good in Cape York.

Yes I have requested a full and lengthy response to the issues I have put to you. I have considered your short reply and find it wanting. These issues I have put to you are very real and can only be answered at senior management level. Your continual shifting of responsibility onto lower level staff and the way you put it, have him veto and waylay any serious questions at that level and not bother you with them has some serious implications.

You go on about Reasonable requests and time constraints at district level. Lets have a time and motion study started immediately on not only district level staff but also head office as well. I have read the QAO report and note that they did not do one.

The report is very damning on the operation of the management of the RFS and the lack of interaction between **volunteers** and head office. I am offering you the chance to rectify that and as mentioned above all the issues I have put to you can only be answered at senior level.

I have worked for many high profile companies and have never had the Managing Director delegate questions about policy to a lower lever employee. I have worked for many multi-millionaires and have found everyone of them willing to sit down and discuss every issue I have put to them, some of which saved them money.

Yet here we are, the Assistant Director of the Rural Fire Service putting up smoke screens to divert and waylay serious questions insisting we the **volunteers** use a so-called 'Chain of Command'. This indicates that you have had a recent military career and are trying to impart a similar level of army discipline upon the **volunteers** of the rural brigades.

You also state that you cannot provide answers to the issues I have put to you as this would also substantially and unreasonably divert rural operations resources from use in the performance of key functions. Again a time and motion study is warranted here.

What gives here, are you just a figure head receiving 100k plus along with perks and cannot answer anything yourself, you again say that head office staff have too much to do and have no time to send reports to you, that you cannot answer questions about the operational procedures, future policy, research and development and all the other questions I have put to you without handing the work over to others.

As you already have two copies of my request for information from you there is no need to send another. Take note the I have added *PART B* attached to this further request with additional questions which must also be answered. Attach this Part 'B' to the 14 page submission you have already received.

Dear Mr Rothwell AFSM

Another wonderful day in paradise and the recent rain has pushed the beginning of the fire season back a bit longer, so alls well and good in Cape York.

Yes I have requested a full and lengthy response to the issues I have put to you. I have considered your short reply and find it wanting. These issues I have put to you are very real and can only be answered at senior management level. Your continual shifting of responsibility onto lower level staff and the way you put it, have him veto and waylay any serious questions at that level and not bother you with them has some serious implications.

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Yet here we have the Assistant Director of the Rural Fire Service putting up smoke screens to divert and waylay serious questions insisting we the **volunteers** use a so-called 'Chain of Command'. This indicates that you have had a recent military career and are trying to impart a similar level of army discipline upon the **volunteers** of the rural brigades.

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As you already have two copies of my request for information from you there is no need to send another. Take note that I have added *PART B attached* to this further request with additional questions, which must also be answered. Attach this Part 'B' to the 14-page submission you have already received.

I again request you commence the process of answering the questions as soon as you read this third Request. As I stated previously all questions not answered fully would be resubmitted again and again until they are.

Looking forward to receiving answers to all questions in the near future. Lets not drag this out longer then it needs to be.

Regards



Michael Fraser
Volunteer Firefighter.
PO Box 726
Cooktown QLD 4895

Copy of Rothwells
20th July 2009 reply



Queensland
Government

Queensland Fire and
Rescue Service

Our Ref: 09/07828

20 July 2009

Mr Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
COOKTOWN QLD 4895

Dear Mr Fraser

I refer to your further letter received on 11 June 2009 regarding various Rural Fire Service matters.

As previously advised, I am unable to provide you with individual responses to each of the issues raised in your correspondence, given that this would substantially and unreasonably divert Rural Operations resources from their use in the performance of key functions.

However, I consider that much has been done over recent years to enhance the level of funding, resources and support provided to Rural Fire Service volunteers. The following paragraphs are to assist you with understanding the various strategies that Rural Operations has implemented to improve the safety of the community, reduce bushfire hazard and enhance the resourcing, training and safety of our highly valued volunteers.

Volunteer Training

I consider that much has been done over recent years to improve the training provided to our Rural Fire Service volunteers, which has enabled greater collaboration, cooperation and coordination between volunteer and employed firefighters. This training is delivered by paid Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) officers as well as volunteers.

Since 2005-2006, \$1.1 million has been provided each year for the upgrade of rural volunteer training materials and the acceleration of rural fire brigade training.



Emergency Services Complex
Cnr Kedron Park Road and Park Road
Kedron Queensland

GPO Box 1425 Brisbane
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The Volunteer Learning and Development Framework, which was launched in April 2008, is one such example of the significant improvements made to Rural Fire Service volunteer training over recent years. This is a new training structure that links training to volunteer roles, which provides volunteers with the opportunity to develop and maintain the specific knowledge and skills necessary to perform their role within the brigade.

Rural Operations now has a total of 20 Brigade Training and Support Officers across the state, which are a principal point of contact for volunteers and brigades and their focus is on training, resourcing and general volunteer and brigade management. They also provide general 'on-the spot' support and assistance to brigades and assist during operations. These initiatives have increased Rural Operations support to its volunteers and more specifically, these initiatives foster brigade in-training by increasing the capacity of volunteers to provide training within their respective brigades.

Overall, volunteer training delivery has been enhanced and this has enabled greater collaboration, cooperation and coordination between volunteer and employed firefighters. This in turn enhances bushfire response capability and community safety in the urban-rural interface zone and in regional, rural and remote Queensland communities.

Rural Fire Service Appliances, Equipment and Resourcing

Over the last five years, Rural Operations funding has increased from \$18.2 million in the 2005-2006 financial year to \$29.6 million in the 2009-2010 financial year.

The 2009-2010 budget allocation includes, but is not limited to the following key initiatives: \$4.5 million for the construction of rural firefighting appliances and firefighting trailers, which is anticipated to provide 34 new or replacement appliances, which includes the first six of 14 specialised appliances that have a minimum 3,000 litre water carrying capacity and are fitted with essential communications and firefighting equipment as part of the government's 'Supporting Our Heroes' initiative; \$100,000 for the purchase of land for rural fire stations; \$1.1 million for the upgrade of rural volunteer training materials and the acceleration of rural fire brigade training; and \$150,000 in capital grants for the upgrade of existing and construction of new rural fire stations. Further, in excess of \$1 million has been spent each financial year since 2003 on providing personal protective equipment to each active volunteer, which has been at no cost to brigades.

In addition to the above mentioned funding, this government's 2006-2007 election commitment funding provides: additional personal protective equipment funding of \$560,000 for 2009-2010; funding for on-line training materials of \$1.3 million in 2009-2010; funding for casual trainers and additional Brigade Training and Support Officers to enhance

training to volunteers of \$700,000 for 2009-2010; and \$540,000 for communications equipment for 2009-2010.

Volunteer Safety

I acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of Rural Fire Service volunteers, who selflessly volunteer their time to assist their local community, and am dedicated to ensuring and enhancing their safety.

I also recognise the obligations imposed under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* relating to volunteers operating under the banner of the Rural Fire Service. Accordingly, external consultants were engaged to conduct a workplace health and safety review of the Rural Fire Service volunteer organisation to provide a broad assessment of current workplace health and safety practices and to serve as a benchmark for continued improvement in preventative activities. This review was conducted between February-March 2007.

Rural Operations is currently working to address and implement the findings of this review that were taken very seriously. As a consequence of this report, I assigned a Senior Workplace Health and Safety Officer to Rural Operations to progress not only the findings of the report, but to embed sound work practices into all aspects of volunteer management. The QFRS, along with the rest of the Department of Emergency Services, has embraced the ZEROharm philosophy and I have personally seen vast improvements in the Rural Operations/Rural Fire Service auditing of stations and appliances, the introduction of enhanced training with a focus on safety and the general reduction in injuries and claims sustained by volunteers. Workplace Health and Safety is an issue that I have placed a strong emphasis in and I can say that I am satisfied that Rural Operations has made some very impressive advancements in a very short period of time within the history of the Rural Fire Service. However I do acknowledge that there are still further work to be done but am pleased with the progress to date and the path mapped out for the future.

This supports the Department of Emergency Services' Workplace Health and Safety Strategy and ZEROharm philosophy, which ultimately provides a safer working environment for our volunteers.

Bushfire Season Preparations

The QFRS has developed a range of strategies to reduce bushfire hazard, improve the safety of the community and minimise the stress on volunteer rural fire brigades responding throughout the fire season.

Higher fuel loadings are expected in grassland and forest areas for this fire season. Rural Operations will continue to review and analyse the fuel status and climate conditions identifying critical areas as grasslands and forest fuels dry out.

In relation to air operations, the QFRS procures the services of three waterbombing Helitack helicopters for each bushfire season. These aircraft are based at Archerfield airport during the fire season and are available to assist and support ground crews for the rapid response to wildfire within the south-east corner. The QFRS has trained staff who undertake exercises using aerial firefighting resources in each region. Throughout Queensland, there is a system of on-call/when needed contracted aircraft of various types for air observation or water bombing.

As part of preparations for the upcoming fire season, the QFRS State Operations Coordination Centre (SOCC) has adopted a procedure requiring all QFRS regional fire coordination centres and incident control centres to prepare bushfire plans incorporating bushfire alert levels in the respective regions. Regions must also run situational exercises that include interagency participation.

The SOCC coordinates one major and two minor operational incident exercises each year. Pre-season Bushfire Preparation workshops are conducted on an annual basis in each region and a member of the SOCC is in attendance at each of these workshops. A Wildfire Mitigation initiative was introduced by Rural Operations in 2008 to ensure that there is a unified approach to wildfire risk and that wildfire mitigation planning is entrenched within the QFRS.

Bushfire Prepared Community meetings and workshops are held in at-risk communities throughout the State. These are educational meetings to help prepare the community for any upcoming bushfire threat, teaching people what to expect and explaining how to prepare properties for bushfire.

The completely revamped Volunteer Portal, which is a secure internet site that volunteers may access, was officially released on 23 May 2009. This is a valuable communication tool that provides up-to-date information to volunteers, including useful information on the fire season.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and Australasian Fire Authority Council, in conjunction with fire agencies across Australia, are examining what lessons have been learnt from the recent Victorian experience and what improvements can be made to all aspects of the preparation and management of fires. The 'prepare, stay and defend or go early' position is a focus of this analysis and Queensland will closely review any recommended changes to current policy.

An Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) on Bushfires was established following a recommendation from the 1994 Bushfire Audit, which examined Queensland's preparedness for major bushfires that occurred in Queensland and New South Wales in that year. The key purpose of the IDC is to provide a forum for the coordination of policy and procedures relating to rural fire management in order to achieve a consistent, comprehensive and whole-of-government approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities.

Numerous training exercises take place throughout the state each year, an example of this is the Joint Australasian Inter-service Incident Management Training, with all stakeholders to ensure that agencies can work together during a major incident.

Each year television, radio and print media interviews occur at the local level in line with each Region's expected fire season, advising the community of the pending fire season and of strategies to mitigate fire danger to people and property.

Together these strategies are focussed on ensuring the fire service, other government agencies and the community are prepared for this year's fire season. I am confident that the community is safer as a result.

Hazard Reduction and Permits to Light Fire

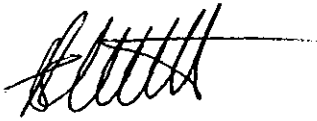
It should also be noted that individual landholders are responsible for hazard reduction on their property. The QFRS promotes the need for hazard reduction burns through Bushfire Prepared Community meetings and workshops, which are held in at-risk communities throughout the State. These are educational meetings to help prepare the community for any upcoming bushfire threat, teaching people what to expect and explaining how to prepare properties for bushfire.

All landowners wanting to conduct hazard reduction activities by way of burning an area greater than two metres in any direction must obtain a Permit to Light Fire from their local Fire Warden. The permit to light fire system in Queensland is legislated under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*. The Permit to Burn system has been established to aid the landholders, communities and industry to use fire as a land management tool. A well established pre-fire regime is a cost effective and efficient method of fire control and suppression.

Please also be assured that at this time, all states and territories, including Queensland, are awaiting findings and recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Victorian Bushfires, which will inform QFRS future policies and activities.

I trust that this information is of assistance in allaying your concerns. As previously advised, please direct any further queries to Inspector Bryan Cifuentes, Area Director, Cairns, Rural Operations, QFRS on telephone number 4039 8243.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Rothwell', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations

Copy of my response to the 20th July 2009 Rothwell reply

Mr Steve Rothwell
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations

Dear Mr Rothwell

I refer to your reply to my third request for information and answers to concerns I hold about the operational strengths and management of the current Rural Fire Service management.

I'm not impressed with your office skills as it took you seven [7] weeks to reply to my third request. You have avoided answering any questions even the questions that refer to statements by you published in booklets and other material put out by the RFS. I'm not requesting your staff to answer the issues I have put to you. As head of Rural Operations I'm asking that **you** answer them. **You** are the person sitting at the top, only **you** can speak for yourself and until **you** do I will continue to request that **you** fully answer each individual matter.

The military mindset is clearly following you into civilian life. The continual insistence that I direct any further questions to the nearest regional office and for them to determine if the questions should be passed on to the next level clearly shows that. As in the army the lower ranks are trained to follow orders. Not debate them. Unbending structured training.

This is clearly raising additional questions of accountability.

Nothing in your latest reply indicates potential; the only item of merit is a small indication of your current funding. [Refer to section 'C' of the attached document] Everything else is just a cut and paste from the latest bulletin. I first requested an answer to the attached issues during April 09' so there has been enough time on your part to have gathered together a complete answer kit.

Your latest seven-week delay has shown how recalcitrant you are and has prompted this response.

When I post this envelope I will allow three working days for it to reach your office, I will not take into account the time your secretary takes to pass this correspondence on to you. From the three-day allowance for postage travel I will add five days for you to reply that a full item by item individual response will be forthcoming immediately with a four-week limit in total. My phone number is in the book as a backup if you think your letter of confirmation will not reach me in time. Either way a letter of conformation must also be posted.

Should you choose to again not respond or decide to not answer any or all of the questions? I will, after the five day grace period begin to post the many copies I have made of the attached document to both state and federal departments that I deem will be interested in this situation you have placed us both in. This mailing will include opposition members and various media services. A cover letter explaining why they are receiving their copy will be included.

I have reached the point where waiting for you to be accountable and sensible has come to an end. Rest assured that the cover letter would fully explain in detail the whole journey that has been taken to get this far

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Fraser". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
Cooktown Qld 4895
Rural fire volunteer

Copy of Rothwells forth
reply



Queensland
Government

Queensland Fire and
Rescue Service

Our Ref: 09/16284

17 December 2009

Mr Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
COOKTOWN QLD 4895

Dear Mr Fraser

I refer to your further letter received on 26 November 2009 regarding various Rural Fire Service matters.

I understand that you are passionate about the various issues you have raised relating to the Rural Fire Service. To address your issues, the following written correspondence has been recorded:

Incoming

Received 18 March 2009
Received 6 May 2009
Received 11 June 2009
Received 26 November 2009

Outgoing

Dated 16 April 2009
Dated 20 May 2009
Dated 20 July 2009
Dated 14 December 2009

You have been provided with detailed information to assist you with understanding the various strategies that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) has implemented to reduce the bushfire hazard, improve the safety of the community and enhance the resourcing, training and safety of our highly valued Rural Fire Service volunteers.

I believe you have also raised these issues with the Regional Manager, Far Northern Region and the Area Director (Cairns), Rural Operations on a number of occasions and they have spent time explaining and responding to your concerns.



Emergency Services Complex
Cnr Kedron Park Road and Park Road
Kedron Queensland

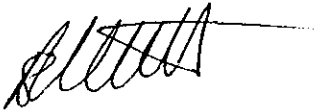
GPO Box 1425 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia

Telephone +61 7 3247 8130
Facsimile +61 7 3247 8123
Website www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au

ABN 93 035 163 778

If you are prepared to discuss your concerns further, then Inspector Bryan Cifuentes would be more than pleased to meet with you. As previously advised, Inspector Cifuentes is able to discuss your queries and concerns with you at the local level and he is in a position to respond on my behalf. If Inspector Cifuentes is not able to provide you with an immediate response to a certain matter, then providing it is reasonable and time constraints permit, he will make further queries and ensure that a response is provided to you as soon as practicable. Inspector Cifuentes can be contacted on telephone number 4039 8243.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Rothwell', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations**

Copy of my fifth request for
Answers cover

Steve Rothwell
Assistant Commissioner
Rural Operations.

Dear Mr Rothwell

I refer to your further response to my requests for information and answers to my concerns about the procedures and management of the RFS.

We appear to approach this issue from completely different angles

I'm requesting information and answers to questions concerning the level of support, equipment supplied and operational policy currently deployed by you to the volunteer rural fire brigades.

You have taken the attitude that the "highly valued" volunteers do not have the right to go above the local regional office thereby restricting all volunteers to only have access to that level.

Your continual insistence of referring me to the local district office shows a complete disrespect of the value you claim you have for the volunteers. It also reeks of major unaccountability and creating an untouchable management level.

In your reply dated 17 December 2009 you claim that you have supplied me with detailed information to assist me understand the various operations that you claim you are implementing. I dispute this claim and ask you to produce a copy of all this information you claim to have provided to me in the four responses provided so far.

By now you are well versed with the content and questions contained within my concerns. I believe that you, after receiving my first request copied and sent that copy to the Cairns regional office.

You now have the three copies including the last one with the extra parts B&C that I have sent plus the copies that you have made.

You also note that you believe I have raised my concerns to the regional manager and district inspector and you are correct in saying that. It was then that I sent my first request to you for answers. I started this quest in September 08.

I am always willing to talk to Bryan Cifuentes yet the questions are not local level and can only be answered by you at your level. You cannot hand your responsibilities down to a district level, if you do why does the RFS need to employ you!

This has to stop.

I'm forming the opinion that there are certainly problems within the management level that require immediate investigation.

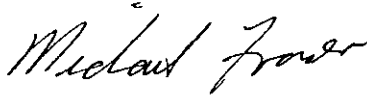
By the way the action I stated in my last request still stands. The holiday season has held it up a bit while waiting for the more important people to return to work. That now is no longer a problem.

You have delayed and dragged this out far to long for what can only be described as delaying tactics in the hope that I will just drop my request. Well it has not worked and I will take this as far as I can.

My offer still stands, answer all of my requests as soon as you receive this and things can be delayed. You have had almost a full year to gather the answers and I will not take an excuse from you that time constraints will not allow you to answer the questions.

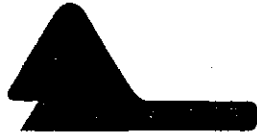
If you again take your usual three to four weeks to reply then it will be on your head as without a quick response from you the other copies I have will continue to be sent out.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Fraser". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Fraser" clearly distinguishable.

Michael Fraser
Volunteer Firefighter. Marton

Copy of the Rothwell response
Dated 10 February
2010



**Queensland
Government**

**Queensland Fire and
Rescue Service**

Our Ref: 10/00632

10 February 2010

Mr Michael Fraser
PO Box 726
COOKTOWN QLD 4895

Dear Mr Fraser

I refer to your further letter received on 19 January 2010 regarding various Rural Fire Service matters.

In your letter, you dispute that I have provided you with detailed information on a range of operational issues. In my letter of reply to you dated 20 July 2009, I provided you with information on various issues relating to:

- Volunteer Training;
- Rural Fire Service Appliances, Equipment and Resources;
- Volunteer Safety;
- Bushfire Season Preparations;
- Hazard Reduction; and
- Permits to Light Fire.

It also appears from your letter that you have formed the view that I have referred you to your local area office because I refuse to communicate and respond to all Rural Fire Service volunteers. I assure you this is not the case.

The reason I have referred you to the local area office is as a service to you, in order to enable a Rural Operations Officer to personally meet with you and discuss all your concerns and issues in detail and to allay misconceptions.

I also wish to reiterate that Inspector Bryan Cifuentes is in a position to respond on my behalf to issues affecting the whole Rural Fire Service and if he is not able to provide you with an immediate response to a certain matter, then providing it is reasonable and time constraints permit, he will make further queries and provide you with a response as soon as practicable.

Emergency Services Complex
Cnr Kedron Park Road and Park Road
Kedron Queensland

GPO Box 1425 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia

Telephone +61 7 3247 8130
Facsimile +61 7 3247 8123
Website www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au

ABN 93 035 163 778

I therefore again strongly urge you to make contact with Inspector Cifuentes to enable a meeting to be arranged in order to discuss all your issues and concerns in detail and to allay misconceptions. Inspector Cifuentes can be contacted on telephone number 4039 8243.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Rothwell', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Steve Rothwell AFSM
Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations