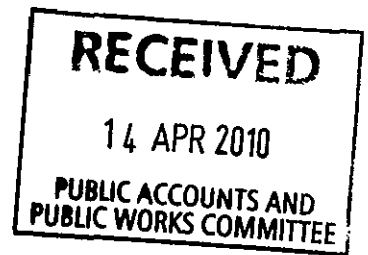


CALIORAN RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

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BRIAN LUND, SECRETARY  
124 Birralee Road  
RIDGELANDS Q 4702  
(07) 4934 5604 (Unlisted)

itslundb@cyberinternet.com.au

10 April 2010

The Research Director  
Public Accounts and Public Works Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE Q 4000

Dear Ms Jeffrey,

Please find enclosed herewith a submission in relation to the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland Discussion Paper.

It is regretted that the quality of our submission may not be of the standard or format required by the Committee and is a direct reflection upon the lack of such skills by the undersigned.

Annexures have previously been shared with members of other Rural brigades, QFRS Rural Operations staff and other interested parties, where applicable.

Many documents alluded to in the submission have not been included, but are generally available upon request.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Lund".

Brian Lund.

**Calioran Rural Fire Brigade**  
**Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland**  
**Discussion Paper**  
**SUBMISSION**  
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**Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?**

As the model has evolved, up to the present time, it is **not** suitable for **all** Rural Fire Brigades, being mainly oriented toward iZone (and perhaps to Village) brigades. This submission excludes the other more specialized brigades, generally referring to the rural brigades (mainly rural and primary producer) who face grass or forest fire as their major threat to life and property.

The current model appears to be based upon imposing the Urban model on to all Rural brigades so that eventually there will be few, if any, true rural brigades in areas near the coast and their skills and knowledge will be lost to the Rural Fire Service. By extension, the imposition of Urban based training on to **all** rural volunteers implies that all volunteers will be **compelled**, in the future, to attend fires in or near urban areas.

Training Manuals for rural brigade members are based mainly upon Urban methodologies and are delivered by people who sometimes have far less “hands on” experience than those members being “trained”, and contain errors of fact and misleading information.

Whilst this may appear to be suitable for urban people making a lifestyle change to rural living (and who have no experience of wildfire or fire-fighting in general and know no better), it does not give them the experience base or local knowledge that is so badly needed, with the result that these brigades are then populated by members who, whilst qualified “on paper”, are operating at less than optimum skill levels.

In any organizational structure this is poor business practice and is a flawed approach, as Urban and Rural fire fighting require entirely different approaches and training regimes, with overlap in the iZone (Urban / Rural interface) and Village type brigades.

Urban fire fighting is basically performed at a static point on a fire (e.g. house fire) that is generally predictable in its progression due to the small number of variables that can affect it and it can have large numbers of resources thrown at it, **in a frontal attack**, in a relatively short period of time, with damage generally limited to the site.

There appears to be a practice in place that assumes such property is insured and that it is of little consequence if the property is partly or fully consumed by fire, and it may be let burn whilst adjoining properties are protected.

Urban fire fighters may well be qualified “on paper” to fight rural fires, but in practice this can be observed to seldom be so.

An analogy would be a bushie going to Brisbane and telling urban crews how to fight a high rise fire - ludicrous!

Rural fires can be much more unpredictable because of the large number of variables that can influence their progression, waxing and waning as terrain, flora and weather influence their progression and a much greater physical area may be damaged or under threat.

One of the observed problems with both urban and inexperienced rural fire-fighters is their lack of understanding of micro climate, variability of flora by areas and how these affect rural fires and their inability to “read” the local weather conditions, be it something as simple as wind strength and direction.

Bureau of Meteorology data will NOT give them localized information, and conditions could vary dramatically within a short distance and within a short time frame.

True rural brigades, with relatively fewer resources available to them, are usually capable of minimising damage to livestock, machinery, outbuildings and other assets, crops and native fauna and flora and they clearly understand how to utilize fire to fight fire, unlike urban brigades (and, increasingly, some rural brigades) and seldom would they simply sit and wait for a wall of fire to approach them and then throw large quantities of water at it in an attempt to extinguish it.

Many Rural Brigades (volunteers) are increasingly being compelled to undertake traditional (paid) Urban tasks as well as rural tasks - no doubt at a much lesser cost to the State, and it appears that brigades with appliances (vehicles) are being increasingly treated as “de facto” Urban brigades in many ways.

There is a growing trend by QFRS staff, compelling rural volunteers to attend fires, even more so if that brigade happens to have an appliance (light attack or medium attack vehicle, but not a trailer or slip-on unit) - if there are not enough volunteers available to crew the vehicle it is simply removed by senior QFRS personnel, or at their direction. NO thought is given to protection of that particular brigade area should a fire break out and there is no vehicle or other fire fighting resource immediately available - this type of action is reprehensible and displays total disregard for the residents of that particular brigade area.

This is not applicable to where a brigade has joined with another brigade to assist them to more easily control a fire, whether it is in an adjoining or nearby area, although it has almost reached the stage where adjoining brigades can NOT assist each other UNLESS directed to do so by FireCom, contrary to the previously accepted practice of helping neighbouring brigades in need, where time is of the essence.

There has also been a recent suggestion that rural volunteer fire fighters who do not respond to a call for attendance at a fire should be deregistered as members of their brigade.

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The Rural Fire Service is staffed and controlled by ex-urban personnel, with few, if any, experienced ex rural staff and they do not appear to exhibit an understanding of rural asset protection or care, talking “down” or “at” volunteers, not “to” them and thus not making them feel part of the process.

It is a major error of judgement by the Commissioner to appoint people to positions of authority, without such persons having demonstrable skills, experience and/or qualifications. Is the Commissioner so lacking in expertise?

This also demonstrates the obvious contempt that is held toward rural fire brigades and their volunteer members.

Persons in charge fail to instruct rural brigades under their control not to deliberately allow fires to burn under fence lines (with the obvious repercussions for high tensile barbed wire, steel or wooden posts) or under yard rails nor to leave gates between grain crops and adjacent stocked grazing paddocks open, should they have lost a “controlled” fire into adjoining private property. These brigade members SHOULD know better, but apparently don’t, because they haven’t been trained correctly.

They don’t think landholders on adjoining land to where a “controlled” fire is being lit need to be kept fully informed, at all times, of their proposed actions.

Most don’t appear to actually comprehend how rural people make observations of, and understand, their environment - whilst it may be taught in part, most of the skills are obtained through experience and with the effluxion of time, although most rural people may not be able to articulate their observations step by step.

Urban personnel with or without appliances turn up at rural fires and take control of same - yet they don’t know the country and their vehicles are not generally suited to the task at hand. This appears to lead to fires that take much longer to control than if experienced locals were left in charge of operations.

Control of urban fires should remain with urban personnel and control of rural fires should remain with the First Officer of the area within which the fire is situated and he should have control over any urban personnel attending such fire, unless he relinquishes such control to another person. Letting an Area Director (Inspector) or an urban Officer with demonstrated inexperience take control is also a recipe for disaster.

A similar situation exists where a rural brigade from another, distant area is sent in and takes control over locals - what is alarming is that they don’t seem to understand that their lack of local knowledge and subsequent decision making may be actually making the situation worse, not better!

It is obvious that suppression of fires comes a poor second to the exercise of power.

#### **Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland - Discussion Paper - SUBMISSION - Calorian Rural Fire Brigade**

FireCom operators will often call out an urban appliance to a rural fire (in response to a '000' call), yet the rural brigade within whose area the fire is situated may not be called upon. FireCom seems to have little understanding of rural brigade areas, calling out distant brigades to fires whilst local brigades situated a short distance away are ignored, with obvious results. Looking at a map on a computer screen is no substitute for having a mental image of an area (local knowledge) and using the map as confirmation, something that appears to not be part of the QFRS system of training.

They have even been heard instructing a rural brigade to attend a fire that is purportedly only a few kilometres away, yet the FireCom operator was completely unaware that there was a large river and no bridge (the closest bridge was over 40 km away) between the brigade vehicle and purported fire. (It was only smoke, the fire was 30+ km away).

As a call-out centre, FireCom is no doubt generally suitable for an urban setting, but for many rural areas it is a disaster in so many ways.

For rural residents situated some distance from urban centres, the utilization of '000' for a primary fire call may not be in their best interest, and they should all be made aware of the telephone contact numbers and UHF CB radio channels of their local brigade members - a response time of 5 minutes versus 15 minutes (or considerably more, in many instances) can mean much in a rural area, perhaps more so than in an urban setting.

A rural crew arriving promptly upon the scene should be able to make a suitable assessment of required resources, far better than a FireCom operator taking a '000' call from a distraught person, plus they can commence action that may make a vast difference to the outcome of the fire.

Urban crews will be called to a fire in a rural area, attend and extinguish it and then return to their station - they don't seem to understand that a crew with suitable resources has to remain on site until it really is safe to leave, and that the area has to be monitored continuously, often for many days.

Fires, supposedly extinguished and made safe, seem to have an uncanny knack of jumping "containment lines" and re-igniting - sometimes creating a much larger problem than the original fire.

How many urban appliances (Red trucks) carry backpacks for use at rural fires, let alone the urban officers knowing where or how to best utilize them?

Other than Rural and Primary Producer brigades, it is suspected that other brigades do not carry a pair of fencing pliers, 10 metres or so of plain wire and a simple wire straining device to ensure any fences that may be cut for fire access can be quickly, if temporarily, repaired when leaving the paddock - nor are they instructed or trained to so do. Unless the landowner is present and undertakes to repair the fence, it should be repaired immediately.

They don't appear to be trained nor understand that there may be livestock in such a paddock and that cutting a fence and leaving it open after the fire has been extinguished will enable livestock to stray - with possibly fatal consequences to animals or humans or damage to adjacent crops, affecting people's livelihood.

Because they don't see any livestock doesn't mean they aren't there, and many don't recognize what a crop is or how fire may affect it.

There appears to be nothing in the training that makes people aware that cattle (in particular) will be upset by strange people or vehicles and may rush.

Training doesn't extend to understanding how to conduct a back burn off a cattle pad, a slashed break or even unmown grass (including where and how to light the grass and how to suppress excess rate of combustion), let alone cutting a fence near a strainer post wherever possible.

**Is the existing funding model, including resource allocation, appropriate?**

The current funding model is appropriate, providing the procedures and guidelines (as currently in print) and Acts are adhered to, notwithstanding the fact that Councils have control over some of the functions, without the responsibility for fires. There is no reason why this should not remain so into the foreseeable future, from a brigade perspective, although the procedures could be streamlined considerably.

What IS of some concern is the fact that the provisions of the various Acts and the relevant sections of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual (1/7/2007) are being selectively (or deliberately) ignored, relevant to the raising and distribution of rural fire levy funds.

Of further concern is the QFRS attitude to brigades having reasonably healthy cash reserves - yet any brigade that doesn't have such reserves will not be able to function effectively in the short or long term, nor meet its obligations should an emergent need arise (as was evidenced during the 2009 fires).

They would be technically bankrupt if QFRS continue with this policy of not making provision for future needs.

Resource allocation is a different matter, apparently subject to the whim of QFRS staff, as the Auditor-General correctly points out that QFRS haven't captured sufficient data to make a valued decision on so many matters.

There is a distinct difference between "needs" and "wants", an analysis of which appears to be often overlooked in the decision making process.

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It is the observed inability of QFRS staff to liaise closely with the individual brigades that remains the problem - something that simply did not occur prior to 1994, when the local inspector was in very regular contact with brigades and seldom missed a meeting of a brigade.

Without intimate knowledge of the needs of an individual brigade, a good working knowledge of the brigade area and a good working relationship with brigade members, poor (and sometimes rash) decisions are made.

Capture, analysis and reporting of the levels of brigade funding is really a simple matter, although formulating a suitable procedure appears to be beyond the capability of QFRS staff who should be responsible for same.

Any competent method would utilize actual and projected figures for any given period or timeframe.

Such method should be kept to a simple, easily understood, standardized format that is relevant across the whole of the Rural Fire Service.

If Local Government has been able to successfully utilize such a function for so many decades, there is no reasonable excuse for QFRS not to so do.

*The Auditor-General has apparently overlooked a number of important matters in his report, which seems rather unusual.*

The Rural Fire Brigade Manual 2007, Secs. D7.5 & D7.6;

Fire and Rescue Service Act 1993, Sec. 128A;

Local Government Act, Secs. 971 & 972,

are referred to in the raising and disbursing of a rural fire levy by a Local Authority.

QFRS, relying upon only one clause of the Auditor-General's report (cl. 4, p. 20), has instigated the formation of numerous Local Area Finance Committees in Local Government Areas for the raising and disbursement of rural fire levies **for all rural brigades** in the respective Local Government Area. LAFC's are apparently exempt from the provisions mentioned in the above paragraph (Acts & Manual), yet there appears to be no legislative provision for same.

In cl. 4, p. 20, the Auditor-General appears to have confused a Rural Fire Brigade Group with Finance Management Groups (now known as Local Area Finance Committees) - his observations are imprecise and unclear.

[A Rural Fire Brigade Group is formed (or continues) pursuant to Section D9.1 of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual 2007 [with their constitution per RFB Manual (August 1999), Annex A, Chapter 13 & following the provisions of Chapter 13]. A copy of the constitution was not included with the 2007 Manual].



It is considered that such Committees (L AFC) and their appointment by a Local Government are not complying with the provisions as outlined in the various Acts and Manual as noted above, notwithstanding the fact that a Local Government may be providing funding from either their General Fund or from a Rural Fire Levy.

It is thus assumed that they also fail to comply with the provisions of Sections 452 to 464 of Chapter 6, Part 1 of the Local Government Act so that any such committee (L AFC) and any Council appointing same may be acting *ultra vires*, and that the Local Government Act, Chapter 4, Part 3, Sec. 237 may also be relevant.

*How did the Auditor-General miss this?*

It has been noted that at least one Local Government has raised a Rural Fire Levy on all land within its area and then provides a form for objection and possible refund - but there did not appear to be any legal provision for them to undertake refund action on a Rural Fire Levy, nor would the brigade have an accurate understanding of its funding level.

*Auditor-General's annual audits have apparently missed this, as well.*

In the matter of a rural fire levy and the way in which control of same is slowly being transferred to direct QFRS control at the instigation of the Commissioner, reference should be made to the intent of the legislators and to the form and effect of the legislation as it currently stands.

The "Queensland Bushfire Strategy Report" presented to Parliament on 9 September 1994 is extremely relevant in these matters and appears to be the basis for much subsequent legislation.

Whilst the thrust of the report appears to focus on the need for compulsory rural fire levies for the rural-urban interface zone, QFRS seem to be relying upon clause 5, page 16 of that report, in isolation, to justify their current actions - whilst ignoring the clear observations outlined in clauses 3 and 4 on page 15.

Although the above references appear to be most relevant to the current situation, the whole Queensland Bushfire Strategy Report 1994 should be read and understood, whilst also recognizing that some parts are now outdated.

What appears to be overlooked in the matter of levies is that the rural-urban interface and rural residential type areas have a large ratepayer base, relative to their physical brigade area, unlike larger farming and grazing areas with a small ratepayer base and a much larger physical brigade area.

An example would be 300 small properties levied at \$20 each (\$6,000) versus 30 larger properties at \$20 each (\$600).

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A major stumbling block where a Local Government resolves to issue a rural fire levy is the wording of the resolution, especially where a LAFC has been involved. The larger rural properties could consist of multiple parcels of land, held under multiple titles but operated as a single enterprise - yet each parcel may attract a levy, depending upon the wording of the resolution.

It is also far more likely that owner of a large enterprise will have suitable fire fighting equipment "on property" than would a small rural residential block owner, thus effectively paying multiple times for the same level of "service", and may be active in the local brigade, unlike the owner of the small rural residential block. The wording of fire levy resolutions, in all instances, is critical (as are all resolutions).

All brigades, with judicious planning, should be able to self fund, in conjunction with their local community, most of their requirements for equipment, but if QFRS wishes to utilize urban brigade units as the first line of fire defence then it may be that such areas will have to be taken under the urban fire brigade levy area and additional fire stations and equipment provided so that response times stay within acceptable limits.

Only those brigades so affected would know the answer, but such action may not be acceptable to the community.

Raising a rural fire levy over the whole of a Local Government Area to subsidize the urban-rural interface brigade needs (or wants) unjustly penalizes those rural brigades that live within their means and who function efficiently, seldom (if ever) having large, uncontrollable fires to contend with.

In many rural and primary producer brigades (and possibly other brigades) there is usually much fire related expenditure that is unaccounted for. Use of private vehicles, private fire fighting equipment, telephones, computers & internet access, parts for emergency repairs, UHF CB radio usage, fuels and oils, staked tyres on vehicles and machinery, etc are often unquantified in brigade records and are met from individual members' resources.

How does one provide a piece of documentation (for reimbursement) for a brass fitting that may have been purchased 10 or 15 years previously, as part of a bulk purchase?

*The Auditor-General failed to quantify and report on such matters, having failed in his duty of care to so do.*

*QFRS, with their usual lack of comprehension, are no doubt also unaware of same.*

**What effect is Urban encroachment within brigade areas having on Rural Fire Brigades?**

Greater demand upon the services of the affected Brigades, necessitating better equipment and enhanced, urban based training combined with a need for more volunteers. Brigades in some of these areas are essentially operating as de-facto urban brigades, but unpaid.

The inability of urban dwellers making the tree change (to a rural environment) to appreciate the complexities of fire and the necessity to take greater preventative action is a major problem, further compounded by the actions of the Commissioner in effectively reducing easy resident participation in their local brigade.

Notwithstanding the fact that such an observation may be refuted by QFRS, it is glaringly obvious that brigade volunteer numbers have been reducing, sometimes alarmingly, since the 1994 high.

In the past, brigades that actively encouraged all residents to attend meetings, training days and social events had strong, active memberships and community involvement. Membership was approved by each brigade, not by the Commissioner. Local brigade members generally knew who the local people were that had a fascination with fire and a close eye was kept on them, resulting in very few major fires. By encouraging them to join the brigade they could be kept under a tighter rein and they got to light fires legally and sensibly, but they were seldom promoted to a position of authority.

With the running down of brigades in recent years, many of the older, more experienced fire fighters have resigned from the brigades (some in utter disillusionment), to the detriment of the community - especially in areas where urban encroachment is taking place and that experience is most needed.

Another interesting phenomenon that may be observed is the rise of people with an apparent fascination with fire to positions of authority within some brigades - this should be identified and discouraged.

**How can the increasing demands on Rural Fire Brigades be managed effectively?**

The answer to this question hinges upon what classes of brigades are referred to, but, given that this question is undoubtedly based upon brigades in the rural-urban interface (iZone), the answers should relate to same.

Some brigades (other than in iZone) may see only slight demand increase and can either manage quite effectively within their existing structure or they may require a minor upgrade of their resources and a slight increase in funding, both easily achieved.

Training and resourcing, relevant to the needs of an individual brigade, may be one answer, or a classification approach to training as well as resourcing. This would necessitate a change from the current “one size fits all” approach, but it may mean greater acceptance and uptake by volunteers and brigades.

Training is an often misused terminology used to justify someone’s idea of what they think is needed - but they fail to appreciate that it has to be relevant and competent.

It should be noted that volunteers are seldom individually consulted, let alone kept fully informed, on a wide range of matters that affect them (and their families), yet they are major stakeholders. Instead of being compelled to do things that they may, as an individual, not find to be in their best interest they should be kept fully informed and allowed to make their own risk assessment upon the matters under consideration, in compliance with Workplace Health and Safety guidelines.

Many volunteers tend to follow without question, and don’t make waves (a “herd” effect).

iZone (Village perhaps less so) brigades may need to be brought under the Urban levy umbrella, but those brigades (and specifically ALL their members) should be consulted prior to any such change - they may wish to resign from the brigade, partly based upon the fact that they no longer need be responsible for protection within their own community as such responsibility will pass to the Urban brigades that will service the area, or they may wish to explore other options.

This doesn’t canvass the thoughts of the whole of the community, which may or may not be thought to be necessary - it is suspected that community meetings are seldom called to openly gauge the wants, needs and perceptions they may have.

It is a relatively easy process to follow, to change the Urban boundary and make new classes of prescribed properties if the existing classifications are inadequate.

Large areas of rural land remaining could possibly be absorbed into adjoining brigade areas (along with existing personnel, finances and equipment), after consultation with all stakeholders and with the necessary brigade boundary amendments.

**Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?**

Page 20, first paragraph of the Auditor-General's report notes that Rural Fire Brigades are established under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990.

However, upon perusing the Fire Service Act 1990, No. 10 (assented to 25th May, 1990) it is noted that Schedule 3, clause 9 on page 64 appears to enable a Bush Fire Brigade that was in existence, pursuant to the Rural Fires Act 1946-1984, immediately prior to the appointed day to continue in existence as a Rural Fire Brigade.

Clause 20A of the Acts Interpretation Act 1954 was subsequently applied to this provision.

What the intended effect of legislative changes to the Fire Services Act 1990 as at 1 July 2007 were (becoming Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990), and how such changes materially affected Rural Fire Brigades is unknown as there appear to be no explanatory notes available - but there appeared to be no savings clause relevant to Rural Fire Brigades, unlike Urban brigades and Urban Officers.

It is known that, for individual brigades, there is a great variance in individual skills that produce results that are not always as good as could be expected or as may be desired, but generally they are open and transparent to both their members and their community.

As with all volunteer organizations, participants in office-bearer positions may have skill levels ranging from very high to almost non-existent, and it has always proved difficult to attract suitably experienced people to fill these positions. Socio-economic grouping and educational levels are also factors to be considered.

Although there is a form of training provided for Secretaries and Treasurers, some of the documentation provided is less than ideal and contains errata.

For QFRS Rural Operations the matter is of much greater concern.

It appears that most senior staff are ex-urban fire fighters, many of whom don't have the necessary financial, administrative or interpersonal skills and/or qualifications.

Other staff employed to assist in administrative or other (sometimes voluntary) roles also appear to not have skills commensurate with their positions.

It is assumed that this may not apply in every district.

Forms, documentation and reporting methodologies could be streamlined to enable a possible reduction in office personnel and administrative time which would enable Area Directors and other personnel to have greater contact with brigades and a substantive increase in resources to brigades may even result.

Most increases in funding appear to go towards additional salaried personnel and very little towards much needed resources.

It may be necessary to re-deploy unsuitable staff to other positions within the organization and to employ people with the requisite qualifications and/or experience to ensure that the recommendations by the Auditor-General may be complied with, as well as ensuring a more effective administration.

The Auditor-General did not appear to recommend that basic financial and clerical training be implemented by QFRS to assist brigades requiring same, let alone to Rural Operations staff.

Those brigades that have office bearers without these skills may be severely disadvantaged, although it would not be all that difficult to produce pro forma documentation with explanatory notes, to assist in upgrading their skills or to assist them to fulfil their functions of office more efficiently.

The matter of Local Area Finance Committees has been addressed under the funding model heading, but transparency, openness and accountability of these committees is non-existent at the present time, operating in total secrecy.

Local Governments may not be as open and accountable as they should be in the matter of accounting to individual Rural Fire Brigades for fire levies raised and reimbursed. It seems strange that there is no provision for them to so do.

As it currently stands, a brigade does not appear to be entitled to receive documentation (a reconciliation statement) specifying the number of properties upon which a rural fire levy was raised and the quantum of same, the gross amount of such levy, the quantum of levies paid and the quantum of arrears for either the current or previous Financial Year, by property, plus funds retained as fees by the Council.  
(But there may be individual Councils that do provide the same or similar information).

Without such data brigades would be providing technically incorrect financial information to the Area Director - Rural Operations, the members of the brigade and the community they serve (as well as to the Local Government, when applying for a rural fire levy).

*How did the Auditor-General miss such an important point?*

In fact, the Auditor-General seems to have had access to documents that differ substantially from those provided to rural brigades and under which brigades are supposed to operate.

**What should be the role of Fire Wardens within the Rural Fire services model?**

The retention of Fire Wardens in the current model, particularly within rural areas, is imperative for the efficient and effective management of areas under their control.

They are usually well respected members of the local community, experienced in local fire-fighting conditions and have a vast knowledge of local fauna & flora.

They are often active members of their brigade, or, at the very least, actively associated with the brigade in a close working relationship. (There may be brigades that have chosen to effectively ignore their local warden in an attempt to by-pass him, for reasons best known to them).

They are the first line of defence against legal misuse of fire (application for a permit to light a fire at an inopportune time and/or place), although their original powers have been weakened by QFRS and legislation.

Police Officers and Public Servants (or even QFRS Area Directors/Inspectors or Urban Officers) in the role may not necessarily have anywhere near such knowledge and experience and may choose to remain at arm's length from the local brigade or brigades.

The response received by the Auditor-General in this matter may hinge upon what the question was and how it was put (or even if it was asked at all) - but it is noted that the sample of brigades by the Auditor-General was only one-half of one per centum (0.5%) of brigades - a statistically insignificant sample (in the percentages of: iZone - 4%, Village - 0.3%, Rural - 0.4% & Primary Producer - 0.16%) that may not truly represent the truth of the matter, let alone fully reflect the correct situations of all brigades.

Whilst QFRS Rural Operations may choose to deliberately leave Wardens out of the loop (for whatever reasons) most rural brigades do not so do.

Was the additional comment included by the Auditor-General to justify the prior decision by QFRS to do away with Fire Wardens as they now exist, notwithstanding the DES response? (removal of Wardens is apparently under way at time of compilation).

**Are there any other relevant matters the committee needs to address?**

Although the Auditor-General's report has raised many issues, most of them have still not been addressed by QFRS Rural Operations, but it is noted that a few new forms have suddenly appeared on 16 March 2010. Given the actions (or lack of, to be more precise) by QFRS to date in response to the recommendations in the report, plus the quality of the report itself, one would need to be forgiven for thinking the report was actually an answer requiring a question.

Taking away the right of any resident to apply to his/her local brigade for membership and for them to be accepted or rejected by the majority of members present at a legally constituted meeting has created more problems than it has solved (although the need is seen in iZones), as has placing Rural Fire Brigades under direct QFRS urban control. Most rural people have weapons licences, yet they are still subjected to what, at best, appears to be a "fishing expedition". But if they have never been caught and convicted, they will receive a clearance for membership - unless, perhaps, hearsay is utilized.

It would be interesting to peruse the total number of applications made versus the approvals and rejections and how many people have been caught and charged for whatever reason. Police should NOT be protected from providing false or misleading information, and should remain liable at law for any such incompetence.

The most intriguing part is that existing brigade members were not subject to the same investigation, provided they stayed within their current brigade - there may well have been open revolt had that occurred and all newcomers are now discriminated against.

It is unknown if existing Urban officers are subject to the same scrutiny, but given their positions in the community it is expected that they would all have to undergo such investigation - from the Commissioner downward. If they haven't, they should be. They occupy positions of far greater trust than a farmer or grazier who wishes to join his local brigade for their mutual protection.

Exactly what is this "position of trust"? - it is not clearly quantified. If it relates only to children, they shouldn't be within cooee of a fire, nor of fire training, but, as mentioned above, it could be a problem in iZone areas and Urban areas, where far more interaction is likely to occur.

A landowner with a large road frontage that is subject to malicious or other fires may be excluded from brigade membership and the legislative protection purportedly offered if he has a conviction for fishing in a protected area at the commencement of such legislation - yet he may well still hold a weapons licence. He may also have previously held property in an adjoining or nearby brigade area and is an experienced fire fighter with decades of fire-fighting experience.



It seems absurd that such a person can not be beside you when you are in a tight situation, yet an inexperienced person that has done a course and is “qualified” (and, unfortunately, assumes they know everything about rural fire-fighting) must be the one you are stuck with - potentially endangering your life unnecessarily.

As it currently exists, the son of a grazier may wish to join his local brigade - the property has been in the family for generations and all family members have a proud membership tradition with the brigade.

The fire brigade boundary is also the boundary of the grazing property. The son will have to undertake the police check, prior to submitting his brigade membership application. The results shows no untoward outcomes and he is duly voted into membership of the brigade.

Eight months pass, and an adjoining grazing property, abutting the fire brigade boundary/father's property, comes up for sale. The son is assisted by his father to purchase the property as it has a near new homestead and substantial, well kept improvements - most suitable for the son and his new wife, as they have been married in recent weeks.

The son decides to now join the brigade that has responsibility for the area covered by his property - HE HAS TO GO THROUGH THE SAME PRE-MEMBERSHIP POLICE CHECKS as he did eight months previously for his old brigade - stupidity!

Whether urban fire fighters have to go through a similar process when transferring between stations is unknown, but it is suspected that they don't. *If not, Why not?*

[The current system is open to abuse and “empire building” by QFRS staff and could lead to “stacking” of a brigade or a group - there have already been instances of people being appointed by an Area Director to brigade positions (sometimes without the requisite police check), instead of that person being nominated, seconded and elected by the brigade members present at a duly constituted meeting].

Many of the decisions taken by the Commissioner appear to lead towards absolute physical and financial control of the rural fire brigades with the ultimate demise of many due to volunteer dissatisfaction or particular brigade suppression/exclusion, but has very little to do with efficient and effective rural fire fighting.

This attitude is also beginning to infiltrate through many brigades - power and control, not performance (pandering to their ego which over-rides common sense), have become the criteria by which they function.

Whether there is a “secret” move afoot to create “super” rural brigades in many areas is unknown - but it is suspected from snippets of information received, the observed actions by various people and comments made.

Falling volunteer numbers should be a “wake up” call to anyone with an interest in rural fire brigades and their effectiveness - yet very few people can see that if there is a problem now it is going to be exacerbated with the effluxion of time and will cost the community dearly, and **remedial action simply isn't happening.**

**It is rather unfortunate that QFRS Rural Operations have a tendency to deal with both brigades and individual members on a less than open and honest basis - they either don't know or don't care that they are continually being caught out in misleading and deceptive conduct and communications and it certainly causes much concern to some volunteers - but there is no avenue, short of either revolt or resignation, to attempt to redress such a situation.**

*Such actions, from Assistant Commissioner Rural Operations downward, do not engender any form of trust in these people nor in the service as a whole, by many thinking volunteers.* There does not appear to be any good reason for their actions, thus it may be assumed that their motivation must be questionable.

Another area of major concern is the inability of QFRS to keep all brigades fully informed, in a timely manner, on **all** matters that may affect them.

The current Rural Fire Brigade Manual is not of the quality that could be expected of a document of that type, and, although it is of a loose leaf arrangement, amendments and updates are not (or do not appear to be) filtering through to brigades in a timely manner, with far too many matters being amended by word of mouth or separate notification, if at all. [A critique attached as Annexure A]

It has been noted that some brigades may propose to light fires outside their immediate jurisdiction without a permit - yet with the full knowledge and consent of the local Area Director and senior training personnel, bypassing the warden for the area and the first officer of the brigade in whose area the fire is intended to be lit. Another problem area.

The Auditor-General makes little reference to Fire Brigade Groups and doesn't seem to understand their constitution or function, yet they form an integral part of the fire levy process in many areas.

Many of these Fire Brigade Groups are acting in a manner not in keeping with their constitution (may be found in Rural Fire Brigade Manual [August 1999], Annex A, Chapter 13) or the instructional provisions of Section D9.1 of the Rural Fire Brigade Manual of 1 July 2007. It is noted that clauses 14.7 to 14.9 of Chapter 13 of the 1999 version of the manual were not included in the July 2007 version.

Some Area Directors are treating these Rural Fire Brigade Groups as personal fiefdoms, appointing their own nominees to positions that are subject to nomination and election by the members of the Group and completely overriding specific administrative requirements.

Where Local Area Finance Committees have been formed in some Local Government Areas, some rural brigades have been forced to join a Fire Brigade Group under threat of losing their right to their local Council issuing a rural fire levy on their behalf - contrary to the specific instructions in the RFB Manual forbidding such action.

Coercion of brigades to join a Group should not be tolerated by Parliament, but apparently the Commissioner can (and does) get away with such actions, even if it is undertaken by staff to whom he has or hasn't delegated or given certain authority or instructions - the Commissioner remains responsible for their actions, having appointed them to their positions of trust.

Incident report forms are poorly designed (and described) and don't necessarily capture data that would reasonably be expected to be captured to assist in the QFRS decision making processes for brigades.

The March 2010 versions are still not suitable, and are actually less suitable than the previous version. [Current and previous forms attached as Annexure B]

A hazard reduction burn is hardly an incident that requires brigades to be called out, unless the burn has escaped, but the report form is of that format, and may be one example why much information is not provided by brigades to the Area office, as it appears to be unsuitable for reporting just such an event.

Another major problem for rural fire brigades is that QFRS apparently see local Councils as their primary area of responsibility, not the local communities and the brigades that serve them. This would indicate a conceptual problem that is alarming, to say the least, and is not within the designated functions pursuant to Section 8B (a) of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990. [Copy of ABC document attached as Annexure C]

Most rural brigades consist of people (volunteers) who have gainful employment outside of QFRS, or are self employed and either working on or off their property. QFRS doesn't seem to understand this concept in practice, nor do they seem to understand that rural people have rural and other pursuits that must take precedence over QFRS matters, other than in the event of a fire emergency in their local area.

Another area that is overlooked is that many rural fire brigade members may have already worked for anything up to 10 or 12 hours, yet they are compelled to attend a fire that may take many hours or more to extinguish - if they are instructed to be at the fire and actively engaged their work time limit may soon take them into a bodily state similar to alcoholic intoxication and they become not only a danger to themselves but to their fellow fire-fighters - yet they may be instructed to do a 12 hour shift - Why is this happening?

Whilst all property of Brigades vests in the Commissioner, there remains a major problem in the control of such property which needs urgent clarification. It should remain under the primary control of the brigade whilst ever the brigade exists, as in the past - ultimately vesting in the Commissioner.

Rural brigades, via their community, work hard to raise funds and/or raise a levy to enable them to purchase much needed equipment for the primary purpose of protecting their community from, or in the event of, fire.

The community and their brigade should not unreasonably expect that any equipment financed by them (either in whole or in part) and purchased for their primary benefit will, at all material times, be available for their benefit - similar to the expectation by urban levy payers who finance urban fire equipment.

*What QFRS apparently doesn't realize is that much of their funding for Rural Operations appears to come from GST or Consolidated Revenue, so that, in effect, the people have already contributed more than the "subsidized" amount.*

*There is, freely available on the web, a "confidential" document that purports to show that Rural Operations is partially funded from the Urban Fire Levy, as well as from consolidated funds - but departmental financial reports (also containing obvious errors) tend to contradict such erroneous & misleading information - if the "confidential" information was correct, the urban brigades would not be fully funded.*

*No reference is made to equipment that may be provided from sources other than QFRS, at no cost to QFRS - the Commissioner grabs that, as well. Perhaps the donor should retain ownership of the equipment, allowing it to be used by only the particular brigade, with such equipment being returned to the donor should the brigade disband.*

If all the urban fire trucks leave a particular station to attend a fire, a back-up vehicle is brought in from another station so that the community still has some level of protection.

Why QFRS Rural Operations or Urban officers can have the power to demand all rural vehicles leave a particular brigade area to attend a major fire some distance away without a back-up vehicle being available for that particular brigade area is (or should be) of deep concern, especially in times of extreme fire danger.

If an area has more than one vehicle, at least one vehicle and a minimum crew should remain in that area to provide an equivalent level of service and protection as that afforded to urban residents - rural people are not second class citizens.

Such demand also fails to comply with the prudent requirement for a risk assessment to be conducted for the area the subject of the demand.

If the First Officer of the brigade has conducted a risk assessment and formed the view that at least one vehicle and crew (if not all vehicles and crews) should remain *in situ*, how can an Area Director, Area Manager or Incident Controller (via FireCom) who is not present, but is at a fire or sitting in an office a considerable distance away, over-ride such decision, in direct contravention of the Act? Abuse of power, perhaps, or simple incompetence?

Another problem that seems to arise is the habit of “leap frogging” vehicles out of their area, to a distant fire - a more sensible approach would be to stage or step them out so that crews most familiar with an area remain within striking distance of that area and can respond quickly and effectively.

There are cases on record of crews being tasked to fires and they simply have no idea how to get there let alone being able to determine the cardinal points from the fire location - and this problem is not confined to rural crews - urban crews often can't find their way around urban streets and both rural and urban crews waste valuable time waiting for directions from FireCom - and FireCom operators will even over-ride correct directions that are given by a brigade officer familiar with the area.

There is a growing trend towards conducting hazard reduction burns during “office hours”, which is the most dangerous part of the day. Fires are lit any time between 10:00 am & 2:00 pm and taken through the hottest part of the afternoon, with winds increasing and humidity decreasing, yet with little thought to what the result might be if the fire can't be controlled. Whether their local Fire Warden has issued a permit, allowing such action, is unknown.

Such fires take large numbers of resources and personnel to control and are frequently lost (but it is suspected that the loss of control is either not reported or is ignored).

It should be noted that a competent rural or primary producer brigade, having due regard for prevailing weather conditions, would burn a similar area with far fewer resources and personnel in far less time because they would not commence the burn until late afternoon or evening and would carry on into the night, until the moisture from the evening dew reduced the effectiveness of fire or the subject area was burnt out. If they felt conditions were not quite right the burn would not proceed, erring on the side of caution.

QFRS, along with many organizations responsible for fire control within their jurisdictions, appear not to understand cool burning in the earlier part of the year and that, if carried out correctly, it does far less damage to fauna, flora and the environment than much hotter burns conducted after winter frosts have occurred, although the later burns can be executed successfully, IF the weather conditions are conducive.

Many Rural & Primary Producer brigades operate with fire trailers and/or slip-on units, for 4 wd utilities, purchased from and supplied through QFRS, yet the Auditor-General made no mention of these. *Why not?*

Each year, as in other areas of the State, a major exercise is held for rural brigades.

Perusal of documentation reveals an urban influence and appears suitable for iZone crews and equipment, but not so much for Rural or Primary Producer brigades who do not normally carry such equipment as part of their inventory. These exercises do not replicate conditions in the bush, particularly at night.

Attendance at these events, whilst nominally voluntary, in many instances is compulsory as the Commissioner is directing (in writing) the Regional Manager, Rural Operations to direct people (in writing) to attend, with their (specific) brigade vehicles.

Whilst it may be a wonderful political and photographic opportunity for the Commissioner's pleasure, the monies expended could be far better spent in doing hazard reduction burns in susceptible areas at appropriate times and this would also serve as training for inexperienced members.

No thought is given to the families of volunteers (having not intended to attend the exercise) and any plans they may have made as a family unit, well in advance of receiving the direction to attend. It is not a fire emergency. Under these conditions, these volunteers should receive adequate recompense. Self-employed volunteers may have to cancel previously arranged income producing exertions.

Hazard reduction burns may not be as politically exciting and they may not produce as many photographic opportunities nor give the Commissioner as many brownie points, but the paying public would be receiving value and a greater measure of protection for their hard earned dollar, and the fires of late 2009 would have far less chance of occurring. It is particularly noted that many brigades in high risk areas (urban, iZone and rural) are not conducting any hazard reduction burns at all - in contravention of their prime objective and not in accordance with the Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 - apparently the Commissioner doesn't understand this, either.

Reference is made to the expected increase of wildfire in frequency and intensity due to climate change (global warming), not only in the Auditor-General's report but in numerous other documents - such references conveniently ignore the fact that most fires are caused either directly or indirectly by humans (as a consequence of an action or actions done or not done), not always changes to climate, although that is one factor. Queensland (& Australia) has always had a variable climate - we have had far wetter years and far drier years than the average with severe droughts and excessive rain and flooding plus colder winters and warmer summers - but the only constant in all those years has been human stupidity.

To claim that an increase in either precipitation increasing the growth of flammable fuels or a decrease in precipitation creating a drought, let alone increasing temperatures, will lead to an increased incidence of wildfires is a nonsense - an oversimplification. There are many more factors that have to come into play to ensure the correct conditions are met, and there is no person or computer program that can reliably make such a prediction well in advance of the fact, only closer to the actual time.

A prediction is simply a guess - no more, no less! The quality of the prediction will depend upon many factors. We all hear about the ones that were subsequently correct (or substantially correct, depending upon the view of the observer), but those that were incorrect (or substantially so) seem to be conveniently ignored.

An interesting observation is the subsequent increase in illegally lit fires in areas where their increased fire danger has been extensively publicised in the media - a "catch 22" situation, trying to warn the public and extending an invitation to those people who have a fascination with fire, at the same time - almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Fire danger warnings should also include a warning for residents to be more aware of unusual or suspicious activity in their area, something that is seldom heard as part of the initial warning message.

The Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990 (as in force at 1 July 2007) establishes QFRS, pursuant to Sec. 8.

Sec. 8A shows that the service consists only of the commissioner and fire service officers, but, upon reading, seemingly provides no legal protection to Rural Fire Brigade members, other than the First Officer, as Rural Fire Brigades apparently may now only exist at the pleasure of the commissioner.

Finally, blindly following the mistakes made by southern fire fighting authorities and introducing their policies and procedures (and employing staff from those states in senior positions to implement such policies and procedures) is a recipe for disaster.

Does the Commissioner not read and understand what so many Reports, Inquiries and Royal Commissions have revealed?

Have thorough police and probity checks been carried out on all personnel from southern states that are employed or are volunteers within QFRS? If not, this should be done as a matter of urgency, and may reveal some surprises.

Policies and procedures driven by academia and not by proficient, experienced personnel is further compounding problems faced by experienced rural fire fighters.

The much vaunted La Trobe based (?) Bushfire CRC is a case in point, with papers presented by people who appear to have little in the way of fire-fighting skills or experience.

Some papers do exhibit quite astute insights and others contain valuable information, although it appears that the iZone area is the only one of major research importance. Again it is noted that these researchers appear not to recognize the people within the fire-fighting ranks that have a fascination with fire - such people are hardly going to identify themselves and they really have to be identified by observation.

What tends to be overlooked by so many people in positions of authority is that fires are fought and extinguished on the fire ground, not by people sitting in tents or air-conditioned offices miles away, formulating plans that may or may not be based on accurate information - notwithstanding publicity or "spin" to the contrary, they simply cannot see (let alone visualize, if unfamiliar with the area) the fire ground or fully comprehend the situation and poor decision making is often the (non-disclosed) end result.

Sensationalist and/or misleading reporting by the various media is another problem area that has to be overcome - but factual reporting should not suffer - a difficult situation.

Urban brigades consume a disproportionately large part of their budget allocation responding to false alarms (mainly automatic equipment), unlike rural brigades that have few false alarms. This will change for rural brigades as more urban people shift to rural acreage living and see smoke (but not fire).

Mediocrity and perceived incompetence are rewarded within the QFRS structure, but I fail to see why this is so, unless as a form of inducement.

It is unfortunate that the Emergency Services Minister appears to be so unfamiliar with reality as it affects rural volunteers.

In the field individual testing of all senior staff by an independent authority (with the requisite knowledge and experience) should reveal the incompetency's revealed in this submission - fix that problem and there should then be a flow-on effect through the brigades, to the benefit of the organization as a whole.

It would not be all that difficult to generate a questionnaire and to undertake some searching on-site practical questioning to determine their knowledge.

It should be noted that there are some senior staff (ex urban) who do acknowledge their lack of experience and knowledge of the intricacies of rural fire fighting, notwithstanding the fact that they will attend and take control of a rural fire - but whether they remain within Rural Operations is unknown at this time.

It is an unfortunate human failing that we often make the mistake of assuming everyone knows what we know, has experienced all that we have experienced and can do what we can do - and many don't, haven't and can't. This leads to confusion when a matter is under discussion and the parties see things from an entirely different perspective.



We all make mistakes, but not all people learn a valuable lesson to carry through life - some keep repeating their mistakes.

Some people observe or experience something new, recognize an opportunity and add it to their store of knowledge, whilst others remain oblivious to the fact.

Whilst we are all limited very much by what we do know or have experienced, it is what we don't know (and don't attempt to learn) that is of greater concern.

It is noted that many people (both rural and urban) have swimming pools on their properties - but how many have an independent fire-fighting pump and hoses set up for their primary protection, in the event of wild fire? Or tanks, for the same purpose?

Neither the Auditor-General nor QFRS can identify which rural brigades have privately owned and utilized resources, either in conjunction with QFRS supplied equipment or not.

It is assumed that most brigades have not identified, let alone recorded, what measure of fire protection each property within their area has and the resources at their disposal - mainly because of the way the Privacy Act is structured.

Because many brigades now appear to be operating with less direct community involvement and within a more "closed" organization, factors such as tracks, fences & gates, firebreaks, dams and other water supplies and their access are basically unknown for the bulk of the properties within their areas. Greater community involvement would overcome, in part, this problem, but total community involvement would be preferable.

Many of them would have even less understanding of adjoining brigade areas.

Some don't even appear to know where their own brigade area boundaries are situated, on the ground.

The reference to an "advanced standing program (Recognition of Prior Learning) for volunteers" is a pathetic joke - there are volunteers with over 40 years active fire fighting experience and brigade involvement who are classed as "support" and not "firefighter" within many brigades, who have to now undertake a course in Firefighter Minimum Skills, to currently be classified as active firefighters.

There are people who have been active firefighters and listed as brigade members for almost as many years that have suddenly been deleted completely from QFRS records.

QFRS staff have been indiscriminately leaving people (who have been previously advised, in writing, as having left the area) listed as members of brigades whilst removing others who have not left the area - not competent!

The further reference to volunteers who had undertaken training under previous training standards is also questionable - QFRS really has very little idea of which volunteers have successfully completed what training, and when.

Major events, such as at Mt Archer and those at surrounding areas in late 2009, should be investigated by an authority at arm's length from QFRS - allowing QFRS to conduct an investigation into and of itself is not in the best interests of the community nor the organization, unless the intent is to hide as much as possible and not learn from the experience. [Copy of a *Letter to the Editor* of The Morning Bulletin, which was not printed, is enclosed at Annexure D]

Volunteers come under the Department of Community Safety umbrella.

The recent release of the "Revised Departmental Code of Conduct", ethics principle 3 "Respect for the law and the system of government" and the following content is an oxymoron - very few people, either volunteers or paid staff, would have a working knowledge of **ALL** the laws and policies that apply to their work, let alone Government Policy, as is expected of them.

This would be a full-time job in itself, trying to stay abreast of QFRS policy, Government policy and relevant legislation.

Many, in fact, wouldn't know which acts and/or policies are applicable, let alone know where or how to find them or begin to understand them sufficiently to have a "working knowledge" - QFRS doesn't supply all such documents to brigades.

Despite a specific request to QFRS for some such (QFRS) documents, they were never supplied.

QFRS certainly doesn't follow many of the five ethics principles, and it is noted that discrimination (amongst many other things) is still alive and well.

There is also the possibility that the code of conduct may also preclude various discussions (open and frank) at brigade meetings which will instead have to become more "secretive", and comprehensive meeting minutes may no longer be permissible, with sections edited out to comply with legislative and policy requirements. Residents (prospective brigade members or otherwise) attending a meeting may be horrified when they perceive such actions.

Another (really annoying) oxymoron is "Zero Harm" - the only way this can be complied with is to do nothing and to remain enshrouded in cotton wool - in the real world accidents do happen, despite all efforts to prevent them. Had the terminology been "Minimum Harm" it would have been logical.

Rural and Primary Producer brigade volunteer members have little free time available to undertake visits to schools or other community events to undertake fire education - nor may they wish to so do. This is really a function of paid employees.

There also appears to be far too great an emphasis upon volunteers "dressing up" (and the consequent cost of such dress uniforms that may only be worn occasionally) and too little emphasis upon supplying front line equipment. When all brigades have been fully equipped, then, and only then, may funds be expended upon unnecessary clothing. Looking pretty doesn't help put out fires - it simply panders to people's ego.

END

## Annexure B - Cover Sheet.

Form RF14A is required to be completed and returned to the Area Office after a hazard reduction burn and is also supposed to be utilized as a record of volunteer training.

This form simply doesn't provide for the necessary data relevant to a hazard reduction burn to be adequately captured - the previous version of the form is included for comparison purposes.

Unless a hazard reduction burn escapes, it is not an "incident".

Consider the case of a road reserve hazard reduction burn for a distance of 3 km.

The width of the area between the road pavement and the adjoining property boundaries may vary from hundreds to just a few meters.

The road and property boundaries may twist and turn.

The burn may be adjacent to one or more properties under separate ownership.

Adjacent landholders will be (or should be) actively involved with the brigade conducting the burn.

The burn will be lit by the First Officer of the brigade, when wind and other factors are considered to be within acceptable parameters and firefighters will be utilized to progressively ignite the area to be burnt, as needed.

The area burnt will be continually monitored in subsequent days - from 4 or 5 times per day to such lesser timings as may be required and for as long as is required.

Few Rural and Primary Producer brigades carry GPS equipment.

Private vehicles may be utilized to tow fire trailers, whilst other private vehicles may be utilizing privately owned fire fighting equipment - there may be no QFRS vehicles (appliances) involved.

The form appears to be inadequate to capture the necessary data.



# INCIDENT REPORT - LANDSCAPE FIRE (BUSHFIRE) / PRESCRIBED BURN

To be completed by the first attending Rural Fire Brigade

RF14A

V.14 3 March 2010



A3 Brigade Name

FireCom Incident Number

(If known)

Where the response and management of the incident/burn was monitored and supported by FireCom and FireCom Number is provided, completion of Part 1 is optional.

## Part 1

A9 Method of Notification

Other (please specify)

☐ Prescribed Burn

☐ Landscape Fire

A23 Type of incident

Other (please specify)

G1 Estimated date that ignition occurred

G2 Estimated time that ignition occurred

A51 Date of Arrival

A53 Return to Service Date

A54 Return to Service Time

A14 Occupant's Name

A15 - 18 Incident Address

Street/Lot Number

Street or Road Name or RP Number

Town, Suburb, Locality

Postcode

A13 Estimated location of Incident Origin (If address provided above please disregard lat/long)

Latitude

eg: 145°. 19" S

Longitude

eg: 75°. 35" E

## Part 2

A24 Type of action taken

Other (please specify)

A43 Responding Brigades / Appliances

(Please list all responding Brigades/Appliances)

**A56-67 Did any of the following organisations attend?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**(Mark off ALL organisations which attended)**

☐ Electricity

☐ Government Welfare Agencies

☐ Water

☐ Gas

☐ Ambulance

☐ Police

☐ Environmental Protection Agency

☐ SES

☐ Volunteer Rescue Service

☐ Other

☐ Charitable Support Agencies

(please specify)

**A19 Type of property on which the incident took place**

Other (please specify)

**E1 Area of fire origin**

**E5 Ignition factor**

Other (please specify)

**E4 Cause of fire**

Accidental

Suspicious

☐ Undetermined

**F1 Who was primarily responsible for extinguishing the fire?**

Other (please specify)

**F3 Initial attack information**

Other (please specify)

**G4 Fire restrictions in force?**

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

hectares

**G5 Fire danger rating at time of outbreak**

**G6 Permit**

**G6 Permit Number (if required)**

**G7 Vegetation Type**

Other (please specify)

**G10 Estimated rural property losses**

Number of kms fence line damaged

Tonnes of hay/fodder lost

Machinery

Number of livestock lost

Type of structures damaged/lost

Other (please specify)

Type of mobile properties damaged/lost

Other (please specify)

**H1 Estimated Dollar Loss - \$**

**H6 Total number of mobile properties involved in the fire**

(If applicable)

H7 Total number of structures involved in the fire

(If applicable)

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

D1 Number of Brigade personnel injured

No injuries or fatalities

Was any firefighting equipment lost/damaged?

D2 Number of civilians injured

No injuries or fatalities

☐ Yes

☐ No

D3 Number of Brigade personnel fatalities

No injuries or fatalities

Was any private firefighting equipment lost/damaged?

D4 Number of civilian fatalities

No injuries or fatalities

☐ Yes

☐ No

R3 Name

R4 Rank

R5 Volunteer ID (If known)

A42 Did you encounter any problems?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what?

Other (please specify)

Notes Section

Brigade Members Attending

Reset Form

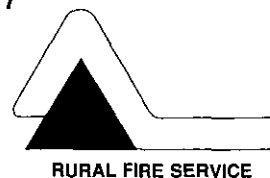
Print Form

Submit by Email



# INCIDENT REPORT – LANDSCAPE FIRE (BUSHFIRE) / PRESCRIBED BURN

To be completed by the first attending Rural Brigade

**\*A3 Brigade Name** **Firecom Number** ☐ Prescribed Burn ☐ Landscape Fire**\*G1 Estimated date that ignition occurred**  /  / **\*G2 Estimated time that ignition occurred**  HH:MM:SS**A51 Date of Arrival**  /  /  **A52 Time of Arrival** 

(Date and time on which reporting authority arrived at incident scene)

**A53 Return to Service Date**  /  / **A54 Return to Service Time**  HH:MM:SS**\*A13 Estimated Location of Incident Origin** (decimals of degrees) S Latitude  E Longitude**A14 Occupant's Name****A15 – 18 Incident Address** 

Street/Lot Number Street or Road Name or RP Number

Town, Suburb, Locality

Postcode

**\*A29 Number of Fire Personnel at Scene** 

(Please complete "Brigade Members Attending")

**\*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 control line effective?**☐ Yes ☐ No**Type of control line used** (only tick one)☐ Direct attack☐ 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)

## LANDSCAPE FIRE ONLY

**A6 Date of Call**  /  / **A8 Time of Call**  HH:MM:SS**A9 Method of Notification**☐ Phone call direct to Brigade☐ Verbal report to Brigade☐ Reporting Person dialled 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 1ha☐ Dispatched and cancelled en route☐ 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☐ Investigate only☐ Other  (please specify)



**A42 Did you encounter any problems?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

**If yes, what?**

- ☐ Lack of cooperation from owner/occupier  
☐ Delay in relaying information to scene  
☐ Inadequate or poor technical advice  
☐ Lack of water  
☐ Poor radio communications  
☐ Inadequate equipment  
☐ Insufficient equipment  
☐ Equipment failure  
☐ Delay obtaining equipment  
☐ Insufficient information given  
☐ Insufficient manpower responded  
☐ Difficulty gaining access to incident scene  
☐ Other

(please specify)

**\*A43 Responding Brigades / Appliances (attach list if necessary)**

Primary Brigade name   
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

(please specify)

**E4 Could the cause of the fire be identified?**

☐ 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** \$

**D1 Number of Brigade personnel injured**

**D2 Number of civilians 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 civilian fatalities**

## ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

<p><b>R1 Is any further action required?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Investigation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No further action required</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/></p> <p><i>(please specify)</i></p>	<p><b>A4 Incident Number</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p><b>Do you require any more forms?</b> <i>(Administration only)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><b>*R3 Name</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p><b>*R4 Rank</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p><b>*R5 Signature</b> <input type="text"/> <b>*Date</b> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/></p>
<p><b>R2 Was any private firefighting equipment damaged?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="text"/></p> <p><i>(please specify)</i></p>	

Notes Section

[illegible]

fold  
here

Fold  
Here

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here

Fold  
Here

No stamp required  
if posted in Australia



**Delivery Address:**

PO Box 460  
ROCKHAMPTON QLD 4700



Rural Fire Service Rockhampton  
Reply Paid 460  
ROCKHAMPTON QLD 4700

Seal - Do not use staples

## Annexure A - Cover Sheet.

This critique was originally mailed to the Area Director - Rural Operations at Rockhampton on 4 December 2008.

A slightly amended version was e-mailed to the Acting Area Director - Rural Operations at Rockhampton on 25 January 2010.

No feedback on the content has ever been received to date.

124 Birrahlee Road  
RIDGELANDS Q 4702  
(07) 4934 5604  
Mob: 0428 79 14 09  
itslundb@cyberinternet.com.au

***I have to preface my comments and opinion in this critique by observing that any Annual General Meeting conducted in the period between 1 July 2007 and subsequent receipt of this new Rural Fire Brigade Manual may not be a legally constituted meeting and the implications that holds for elected office-bearers, officers and members may need to be addressed. Any General Meetings also held within that time frame may also be subject to legal challenge at some future time.***

***For the new constitution to have been legally effective, it would had to have been in the hands of all Brigade secretaries well prior to 30 June 2007 so that General or Special Meetings could have been convened to adopt same, prior to 30 June 2007, whilst still operating under the protection of their old constitutions.***

***Had the responsible officer had the foresight to send copies of the document to all secretaries well in advance of the cut-off date for final review, I would expect that some, at the very least, would have sufficient skills and experience to pick up many of the errors as I have done - obviously the current process is fatally flawed.***

***As it presently stands, I am of the opinion that no Rural Fire Brigade in Queensland is legally constituted (except any that may have had the opportunity to adopt the new constitution prior to 30 June 2007) and we are all operating illegally, given the content of the wording of the Constitution we were all required to adopt unaltered.***

***Because there was no savings or transitional provision in the new constitution and parent Act, nor an opportunity to undertake an exercise similar to this prior to 30 June 2007, this is the inevitable result.***

***As with other areas within the manual, I would suggest that Crown Law be given a copy of this document and a copy of the manual, and their opinion requested, as a matter of urgency. I can foresee the necessity for specific legislation to make good this negligence, even though I don't expect that every matter I have raised would necessarily be correct or be agreed with.***

***If this Manual is expected to be recognized as of legal standing (and I suspect it is), it is a disgrace.***

***Some of the following is subjective but most is objective.***

***Reference to the masculine gender also includes the feminine gender and vice versa.***

***Finally, as a volunteer, I expect that I have the right to attend or not attend any fire of any nature and that I have every right to ensure my own health and wellbeing and that of my fellow volunteers. I also expect that I have the right to not continue to attend any fire where, in my opinion, directions are given that I know will endanger either life or property.***

1. **Green cover sheet:** Does not contain an effective date of the Manual coming into force. *Ideally, this should be in large print so that there is no doubt as to same.*

2. **General - Commissioner's Foreword:** Contains, in very small print "Valid from: 01/07/2007", which can be (and originally was) easily overlooked.

3. **Functions of QFRS Rural Operations Offices:**

**Relationship between a Rural Fire Brigade and the Government:** In part, states "A Local Government does not have any official role or responsibility towards brigades".

*This clause will be referred to later in these observations, particularly in respect to the number of provisions requiring brigades to meet specific and non-specified criteria.*

4. **A1.1 Protecting the Environment:** This section is the first that indicates, in my opinion, a basic misunderstanding of rural fire fighting, **especially wildfire**.

The reference to soil erosion by various causes refers to *fire trails*, a terminology I have not heard used in Queensland in over 45 years of fire fighting.

The same sentence makes reference to fires *prior to major rainfall events* which I find utterly ridiculous - it is my considered opinion, based upon past experience, that no person or organization can predict a major rainfall event with any certainty, although they may hazard a guess [make a prediction] based upon various known and unknown factors and with varying degrees of success.

Some of the requirements outlined in this section require expertise and qualifications beyond the scope that could normally be expected to fall within the average Volunteer's level of skills and experience.

*I would like to see a listing of all personnel so qualified, positions held within their brigades and the names and locations of their brigades.*

5. **For the conduct of a prescribed fire, by an emergency service agency;**

**For conduct a wildfire response by an emergency service agency; (sic)**

The use of the term "any rehabilitation required" is far too general and could be interpreted to mean many different things by different people reading this document, and could well lead to misunderstandings between volunteers and the landholder, **particularly of the quantum of same**.

In any event, this is an area that would appear to me to be beyond the level of expertise required of volunteer fire brigade members and is more a specialist area.

*If this manual is as it purports to be per its title, the above heading appears to refer to an agency of Government, not a Rural Fire Brigade.*

6. **A1.2 Hazard Reduction Programs:**

**What I need to know:** Last clause, first line - delete the words "use of".

**How I do it:** Here is a reference to *control lines* (see also *fire trails* in 4. A1.1 above), as well as environmental issues, which have been addressed above.

7. **Roadside Hazard Management:** Are Local Authorities fully aware of these requirements? I am of the opinion that they may be operating under entirely different policies and procedures.

8. **A2.4 Operations Doctrine:** In general, this section could be assumed to apply to Urban Brigades and has been carried over into the Rural Brigade area.

*Standing Orders* is a case in point - most, if not all, rural volunteers are exactly that - volunteers. Most, if not all, have gainful employment of varying degree outside QFRS and many of them may be employed some distance from their brigade base.

Many true rural brigades don't have fire sheds, let alone fire fighting vehicles.

Except for the really keen members, I would expect that very few would be checking the volunteer portal on a daily basis for *Standing Orders*, let alone anything else.

**A broadband internet connection is an imperative - any rural person with only dial-up internet connection is at a severe disadvantage, timewise, and will also be continually kicked off the portal by the servers "timing out".**

9. **A2.7 Property Handovers and Post Bushfire Procedures:** There are anomalous references contained in this section, and there appears to be some confusion by the author as to what constitutes a bushfire and the relevant clauses of the principal Act.

Again, the reference to environmental issues and advice.

10. **C4.1 Application for Membership:** This section mistakenly assumes that all Rural Fire Brigades have a Management Committee and the "How to do it" section is not in accordance with D7.27 Brigade Constitution, 16 (d) & (e).

Whilst I fully appreciate there is a need to have a specific provision whereby persons who are not considered to be "fit and proper" may be excluded from membership, the author of this section has not fully thought through the phraseology and methodology nor does that author appear to be fully aware of the provisions of the Brigade Constitution as contained in this manual.

**11. C4.2 Membership Classes:** I find these definitions particularly discriminatory and feel personally humiliated by same.

Because I have a wide range of skills and am able to undertake the position of Secretary/Treasurer within this Brigade (as have traditionally many other males in other rural brigades), it is also derogatory and offensive to me for the author(s) of these classes to assume that we are a lesser class of person without the requisite fire fighting skills or experience, when, in point of actual fact, the obverse may well be true.

*This whole section needs to be carefully reviewed and revised descriptions with suitable explanations must be provided.*

*This observation would no doubt also apply to many brigade chairmen as well as to other brigades' members.*

*It may well transpire that these classes of membership may need to be reviewed, particularly for Class 1 brigades, many of whom have limited membership resources available, and could possibly extend to Class 2 brigades in a similar position. (Note added 3 Dec 08 - and also the new Primary Producer Brigades).*

*Whilst on the subject of discrimination, it appears to me that any person who has difficulty reading and writing (due to various circumstance) is discriminated against in many avenues of QFRS - yet when it comes to actual fire fighting they could well prove to be far more competent than many "qualified (on paper)" personnel.*

## **12. C4.6 Termination of Membership:**

**How I do it:**

**Voluntary Resignation:** The second sentence of this paragraph conflicts with clauses 10 (b) & 18 (b) of the Brigade Constitution.

## **13. C4.7 Membership Roles:**

**What I need to know:**

**Members' responsibilities:** Fifth sentence refers to "this constitution" but should actually state "the Brigade constitution" as it is referring to another material component of the Manual.

**Brigade Office-Bearers:** *This whole segment needs urgent review as a number of meanings and requirements are imprecise and unclear.*

The first sentence of the first clause contains the prescriptive "shall" which gives no option in the makeup of a management committee and the second sentence of that clause indicates a minimum of three persons are to constitute such management committee.

The second clause then requires a fourth person to be elected (presumably if a joint position such as secretary/treasurer or first officer/chairman is held by one of the committee members), *notwithstanding the fact that the first clause appears to have already addressed such a possibility.* This clause negates the *minimum* requirement as outlined in the first clause.

Perhaps the author of this section was trying to achieve a "sliding scale" of persons but could not achieve same by using the written word.

This second clause also contains "(as required in clause 7(a) and 7(c))" but does not refer those clause references to a particular source, thus the wording "of the Brigade Constitution" *should be appended within the enclosing brackets, even though clauses 7(a) & 7(c) do not appear to be the relevant clauses.*

The fourth clause, second sentence makes reference to "...clauses 7 and 8(c) and 8(d) of the Brigade Constitution)." ***Yet there are no clauses numbered 8(c) & 8(d) in the Brigade Constitution and "office bearers" are not created under clause 7 of the Brigade Constitution, which deals only with Management Committee office-bearers.***

**First Officer's Responsibilities:** The fourth sentence begins with "They are.." but should actually read "He is.." as a Brigade has only one First Officer.

**Reference Materials:** Secretary/Treasurer booklet NOT RECEIVED until 22 MAY 2008.

## **14. Incident Report - Landscape Fire (Bushfire) / Prescribed Burn: Sample Form:** Item A30 shows 7 vehicles attended the fire -

How many of them were brigade appliances and how many were private vehicles;

were the private vehicles using brigade equipment or private equipment;

how many persons attending were using privately owned items like knapsacks, pumps, etc? *Surely this type of data should be captured to facilitate future planning?*

Item A43 doesn't show that either a primary or secondary brigade attended the fire. ***IF AN ITEM IS TO BE INCLUDED TO ASSIST BRIGADE MEMBERS IN THE EXECUTION OF THEIR DUTY, IT SHOULD BE DONE IN A CORRECT MANNER - errors and omissions can lead to misinterpretation.***

**There is no suitable form for use in hazard reduction burns - use of the current Form RF14A is unsuitable.**

**15. 7. Brigade Administration:** Second clause, second sentence - Please correct the incorrect English expression.

## 16. D7.5 Brigade Finances - General:

**What I need to know:** The sentence beginning with "All monies handled..." is in contradiction with Clause 30 (c) of the Brigade Constitution, and the following sentence indicates that "QFRS is required to *implement reasonable procedures* to ensure accountability of those funds" and the definition of "reasonable procedures" needs to be clearly defined and added as an explanatory note.

The 10th sentence appears to assume that this directive can over-ride the provisions of a will, under which shares or property investments are bequeathed to a brigade - ***I think Crown Law advice should be sought and this matter clarified.***

Refer to the clause that refers to the keeping of separate accounts on page 2 (of this section), as this clause appears to contradict the 10th sentence referred to above.

**Financial Year and Audit Requirements:** Appointment of an Auditor under the provisions outlined could change from year to year.

There could also be some confusion over which type of auditor should be appointed, **depending upon which definition of "public monies" is correct and from which Act such definition is derived.**

Where a levy is received and an auditor is appointed, the second qualification to this appointment "a person satisfactory to the Local Government" could lead to some confusion in that "the Local Government" is the body corporate for want of a better descriptive, although I would expect the CEO of the Local government would be advising the members of Council. *There is doubt in my mind as to exactly what the terminology really means and the lack of a format required to be followed to gain the Local Government approval leaves that process open to interpretation. There should also be a process that could be followed prior to any meeting at which an auditor is to be appointed pursuant to these requirements, so that the appointment may be made as required under the provisions of the Brigade Constitution. Refer also to para 3 above.*

Where an auditor is appointed who "has demonstrated adequate bookkeeping skills to the satisfaction of the Area Director,..." , *Is the Area Director of any applicable area required to hold suitable qualifications in his own right that will enable him to make an informed decision in this matter, or is it simply a subjective process or does he have specific guidelines to follow?*

**Rural Fire Brigade Fundraising Activities:** Third clause requires a Brigade to obtain a certificate of currency for valid public liability insurance - *A much better administrative process would be to ensure that such certificates were automatically mailed to each brigade as is the current, more efficient, practice.*

**Reference Materials:** Along with manuals that are not provided to the Brigade, reference is made to Associations Incorporation Act 1981, Section 5 (1) (d) (iii) - this simply refers to the matter that an association is not eligible for incorporation if that association is provided for in a special Act that specially regulates its affairs. *Competence and efficiency would indicate that this matter could be addressed in the preamble to the manual, with suitable explanatory note/s.*

## 17. D7.6 Rural Fire Levy:

**What I need to know:** The second clause allows a Local Government *carte blanche* in the matter of a rural fire levy. Whilst it may not be currently applicable, it does leave such matters open to abuse. It also leaves open the possibility of overly harsh conditions being placed upon a brigade by a "hostile" council. *There have to be some safeguards implemented.*

*It appears to specifically over-ride the prerequisite for a public meeting and the conditions precedent in clause 6.*

A further requirement that should be added to clause 6 is *that the Local Government Liaison Officer be required to attend such public meeting* - Local Government should not be functioning in isolation in such matters - it is an absolute waste of hard won, finite resources to go through the public meeting process and reach a decision only to be subject to the whims of a council that has few, if any, members that understand the process and responsibilities of a rural fire brigade - this is all the more applicable with the creation of some of the new regional councils within Queensland.

Fourth clause should be altered to reflect the fact that not all brigades within its area may wish to raise a fire levy for a particular year or at all - *the words "all brigades" appearing before the word "in" should be deleted and the wording "those brigades requiring a levy" inserted in lieu.* [Note RRC rural fire levy fiasco 2009/2010]

Twelfth clause allows a local government to impose any accountability requirements and standards - again, this could not only be onerous but is open to interpretation and abuse, with the resultant costs to a Brigade being prohibitive.

### **How I do it:**

**Managing a Rural Fire Levy:** First clause refers to a sponsoring local government, but a better terminology should be utilized in lieu of "sponsoring", given their unprecedented control over certain functions of a rural fire brigade.

The third clause referring to a local government's accountability requirements, standards and timeframes - *relevant documentation should be provided, in a timely, efficient and effective manner, by the local government to the rural fire brigade when the brigade first broaches the subject of raising a fire levy.*

Clause four mentions a local government representative being present at a public meeting to discuss and adopt a fire levy - *contrary to the previous section, which is silent on the matter.*



**ADDITIONAL PROVISION FOR ADDITION:** *In addition to the requirements outlined in this clause, the Local Government shall (be compelled to) advise those present at such public meeting the quantum of monies proposed to be retained by the local government as administrative fees and the methodology employed to determine such fees.*

#### **18. Guidelines for the Collection and Disbursement of a Rural Fire Levy:**

**Introduction:** First clause, second sentence. delete "...in readiness of fire" and insert "...in anticipation of fire and". I acknowledge that the principal Act uses the following wording in S 82 (3) " ... **fire prevention** includes taking measures in readiness for fire ...".

**[Reasoning:** Urban Brigades hold themselves in readiness, up to 24 hours per day, and rightfully pride themselves on extremely short response times as urban fires are a constant threat, but they **can't** simply go and burn down a dwelling because it may pose a future danger; Rural Brigades do NOT normally hold themselves in readiness but take precautions, where possible, by anticipating areas of potential fire hazard and (proactively) taking necessary steps to alleviate same, but, should a fire occur their response (reactive) times can vary from minutes to hours, depending upon many factors, not least of which is that they are not all located in a station awaiting a call & a Brigade may wait years for a fire to occur].

##### **Finances and Accountability:**

*Whilst it is noted that there is a sample Income and Expenditure Statement attached, there is no corresponding sample Assets and Liabilities Statement included, nor, indeed, a sample Depreciation Schedule - **it (they) should be!** (Although I don't see that a Depreciation Schedule is applicable, given that this is the responsibility of the Commissioner).*

1.4 This matter has been addressed in 17 above.

1.7 This matter has been addressed in 17 above.

**1.8 INSERT NEW, additional sentence to this SUB-CLAUSE** - A reconciliation statement shall be prepared by the local government and given to the rural fire brigade not later than the Fifteenth day of July in each year, for the preceding financial year. Such statement shall itemise the name of the landholder, whether the levy remains unpaid or was paid in part or in full, total levy raised, total disbursed by the local government to the rural fire brigade, total retained as administrative fees by the local government and total arrears as at 30 June.

*Currently there is no accountability requirement by the Local Government to the brigade and thus there is no easy way of determining the gross levy for a particular Brigade area and whether monies received are full or partial disbursement of such funds - if there are to be checks and balances they must be applied without discrimination.*

**IN RELATION TO LEVY VERSUS RATE NOTICES** there currently exists an anomaly whereby some land within a rural fire brigade area will not receive a fire levy (if one is raised). This is brought about by *The Valuation of Land Act* whereby two or more rateable parcels of land in the same ownership any distance apart may be linked on the one valuation number and thus the Local Government levies rates & charges against that valuation number (which quite often forms the Council's rate book number/Assessment Number). One parcel of rural land may well fall within a designated town area and the other, much larger property may be some considerable distance away but the rates and charges will be raised on the valuation /assessment number for the designated town area block. A fire levy will also be raised on this same valuation *for the brigade that services that particular area*, whilst the second, much larger parcel some distance away (with, for example, some 3 or 4 brigade areas between the two) will not attract a fire levy, even if the area within which it exists also raises a fire levy.

Following on from this, any approach to the Council for names and addresses of all landholders within a specific Rural Fire Brigade Area (for service of notices, etc) may well result in all blocks (no matter the size) that are linked and rated outside that particular area NOT having any names & addresses provided.

The net effect of these actions is that only a percentage of landowners within such a brigade area will be shouldering the financial burden but ALL landholders may well expect assistance from their local rural brigade.

The only way this can be currently overcome is for the local brigade to seek donations from the landholders directly.

#### **19. D7.7 Donations:**

**How I do it:** *Official receipt books, in the first instant, should be (and should have been) issued to each Rural Fire Brigade as a matter of course, and thereafter supplied upon request.*

It is assumed there is a register of such receipt books maintained by the Area Offices as they are an accountable document, and a record should be available to determine those brigades that have not received official receipt books - **This matter should be attended to as soon as practicable.**

#### **20. Code of Conduct: This is a direct print of the State Public Service C of C.**

Page 34, I am a volunteer - does this code apply to me?

This is imprecise and unclear. Firstly it states that the code applies to all volunteers, then later states there are aspects that will not apply. The waters are further muddled by the statement that members and volunteers of the Rural Fire Service are managed under the Brigade Constitution.

*How would I (as brigade secretary) ever be able to offer assistance and guidance to my fellow brigade members when this document is so obtuse in relation to RFB volunteers? After reading the document I expect that I would not experience difficulty, however, in advising a State Government employee.....*

**A specific Code of Conduct that is applicable to Rural Fire Brigades should be added to the Manual.**

## **21. Brigade Constitution:**

### **What I need to know:**

**The second clause requires all brigades to adopt the constitution unaltered.. notwithstanding the errors contained therein.**

**The fourth clause specifically states that all prior versions of brigade constitutions adopted before July 2007 are ineffective. This clause fails to give the date of 1st, although it may be implied from documentation as mentioned in 2. above and from the Act.**

### **How I do it:**

Whilst the first clause states that "On formation, a Rural Fire Brigade must adopt this constitution" - It is noted that formation of a brigade may only be undertaken at a meeting called for that purpose BY THE AREA DIRECTOR [contrary to the Rural Fires Regulations of 1948]- if that is correct (and I have not seen anything that would cause me to alter my opinion), then clause 16 (h) CLEARLY precludes those persons (members is the terminology used, but is technically incorrect) present from voting to adopt the constitution, AND CLAUSE 16 (H) CLEARLY PRECLUDES ANY PERSON PRESENT AT SUCH FORMATIVE MEETING FROM VOTING upon any matter, NOTWITHSTANDING THE PROVISIONS OF CLAUSE 3 OF THE BRIGADE CONSTITUTION. In my considered opinion, a new brigade can NOT be legally formed under this constitution in its present wording.

**I would suggest the opinion of Crown Law be sought in this matter, as the legal section within QFRS/DES apparently doesn't have the necessary capacity to ensure that this constitution is what it purports to be. If, however, they did tender correct advice and same was ignored, then that person/those persons who negligently chose to ignore such advice should be accountable for their actions or non-actions as may be the case as the lives and livelihood of volunteers could be adversely affected.**

Clause 4 states that a copy of the constitution must be made available **at all times** (italics mine). This clearly needs to be reworded.

## **22. Constitution:**

**Cl. 2** In the third paragraph amend "readiness for" to read "anticipation of". [Readiness would apply to urban brigades whereas anticipation would apply to rural brigades, as explained in 18. above].

**Cl. 3 c)** This clause is in direct conflict with the following clause, 4 (a).

**THERE IS NO PROVISION IN THIS CLAUSE REQUIRING ADOPTION OF THE BRIGADE CONSTITUTION at the formative meeting - HOW UNUSUAL.**

**Cl. 4 (a)** As stated above, this clause contradicts Clause 3 (c) above, although it is the normal practice.

NOTE: The note segment assumes that all rural brigades can follow a structured path WITH REGARD TO MEETING DATES, which demonstrates to me that the author has a limited knowledge and understanding of some rural brigades and rural pursuits.

**Cl. 5 (a) & (b)** *There seems to be a major misunderstanding of how quorums are calculated in specific circumstances. This needs clarification.*

**(d)** This clause contradicts clause 4 (a) above.

**Cl. 6 (b)** *This is a peculiar requirement and does not apply in any other organization, be it non-government, local government, state government, incorporated association or any organization in receipt of funds from the public. When all these organizations meet a similar requirement then I would be only too happy to oblige.*

*The statement that it is to ensure the accuracy of the minutes is a gross misstatement of fact - a nonsense - if such accuracy is required and there is some doubt that minutes are being recorded correctly the meeting should be recorded by electronic means (and, if thought necessary), backed up by a qualified stenographer who is independent and answers only to the Area Director, and the Area Director should be empowered to take appropriate action or offer the appropriate advice to the Assistant Commissioner.*

**Cl. 7 (a) & (b)** These subclauses are in conflict with each other and need to be clarified by a competent person.

NOTE: This note segment refers to subclauses that do not exist in the constitution. The quorums segment is a mish-mash of errors and misconstrued references and demonstrates a distinct lack of understanding of the task at hand.

**Cl. 8** It is extremely interesting to note that, although this clause purportedly refers to "other office-bearers and officers", it deals mainly with officers and remains relatively silent on office-bearers. This clause should really be addressing all office-bearer positions, particularly where a brigade resolves to function without a management committee - there is no provision for same, prior to the next clause.

**Cl. 9 Subclause (i), ii & iii.** I find it a little unusual that nominations for office-bearer and officer positions have to be seconded, but do not object to same. The voting order has also been changed from what would be considered normal procedure as there are normally certain conditions precedent to be met.

**Cl. 10 (b)** There is no procedure for a secretary to resign, in this clause - *it should be addressed. This subclause is also in conflict with C4.6, How I do it, Voluntary resignation, second sentence and clause 18 (b) of the constitution.* There seems to be some confusion by the author of this document as to what constitutes voluntary resignation, voluntary termination or resignation by an office-bearer or officer, when, in some of the circumstances, they are all essentially the same action.

**Cl. 11; 11.1 (a) & (b)** The appointment and/or election of office-bearers to fill a casual vacancy seems to rely heavily upon decisions by a management committee and these subclauses remain silent in the matter of a brigade that operates without a management committee.

**Cl. 11.1 (c)** *Makes reference to Rule 10.2 - as far as I am aware there is no Rule 10.2 within the constitution, and, as with many of the other errors I have uncovered, the copying process from some other document to produce this document has been less than creative and has led to a plethora of unnecessary errors.*

**Cl. 11.2** This clause duplicates Cl. 8 in part. *There is a distinct need to clarify both these clauses. Both clauses remain silent on matters that should have been addressed.*

**Cl. 12 (ii)** Refers to the content of the constitution as "rules", but my understanding is that a brigade may make rules pursuant to **Cl. 26** of the brigade constitution, and that the content of a constitution is not referred to as "rules", but as "clauses" & a specific clause would be named "Brigade Rules" or similar.

**Cl. 13** Subclauses (c) & (e) could be amalgamated. **Subclause (g) raises the question of quorums yet again - refer 5 (a) & 7 "NOTE:"**

Subclause (m) deals with Minute book inspection and the word "reasonably" should be deleted and the word "reasonable" inserted.

Subclause (n) raises the unique requirement for *both the chairman and secretary to sign the minutes - dealt with in Cl. 6 (b).*

**Cl. 14** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 15** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 16 Addressed in 11 C4.2 above.** Subclause (a) (i), second sentence, needs clarification.

Subclauses (d), (e) & (h) urgently need to be reviewed in their content and intent - *refer also to 21 above.*

**Cl. 17** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 18** No further comment applicable.

**Cl. 19** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 20** Subclause (b) does not state that Full names shall be kept, and the matter of birth dates for wives of active members who may wish not to fully divulge same should also be addressed. Some of these requirements appear to require more personal data than could be considered reasonable under the circumstances, especially for rural brigade members.

**Subclause (c) wording implies there are unofficial brigades.**

**Cl. 21** No further comment applicable as it is essentially dealt with in **21 above.**

**Cl. 22 (c)** *The period within which the biennial or Annual general meeting shall take place should be extended to within six (6) months after the end of the preceding Financial Year - there is not sufficient flexibility currently available to address the necessity to feed stock due to the ravages of drought or the requirements to undertake rural pursuits like crop planting or harvesting and the effect that may have on the availability of members to attend meetings. These are matters that must be attended to until they are completed, and structuring meetings around members' requirements is a necessity.*

**Cl. 23 (a)** *The order of business referred to is at odds with accepted meeting procedure and needs to be reviewed.*

Subclause (b) is addressed in **Cl. 6 (b) above.**

**Cl. 24** Needs re-wording, as does subclause (a), and missing components inserted.

**Cl. 25 INSERT** A further subclause (a)(iv) worded "by the secretary, in response to urgent matters that may arise". [e.g. had a copy of the brigade constitution been received prior to 30 June 2007]

**ALL correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary, in the first instant.**

Subclause (e) again raises the difficulty and confusion with the number of members that constitute a quorum.

**Cl. 26** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 27** Subclauses (g) & (j) should have provision for those brigades that only hold one meeting either annually or biennially.

Subclause (n) causes some concern. *Why does the local shire council have to be consulted with respect to making audited financial statements of the brigade available for public inspection, as this implies public inspection similar to Council financial statements? The cost of compliance will, in some cases, be prohibitive and will further reduce monies available for actual fire prevention & control measures, or will necessitate a greater quantum of fire levy than that which ratepayers may find acceptable.*

*The only people who are (or should be) legally entitled to view these accounts are the landholders [ratepayers] within the specific brigade area upon whose property the levy was raised, as they are the relevant stakeholders in this process, plus a copy for the relevant Council.*

**The additional requirements under subclause (n) (ii) are a financial burden that must be accounted for in the original levy consultation process and is not addressed in 17. D7.6 above, and needs to be read in conjunction with that comment.**

**Cl. 28** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 29** No comment applicable.

**Cl. 30** This matter is addressed in **16. D7.5 above.**

**Cl. 31** No comment applicable.

**23 D7.28 Meeting procedure:**

**How I do it:** Sixth paragraph - **this advice is absolutely incorrect.** *The chair has (and always has had) both a deliberative vote and a casting vote.*

**24 C7.29 Ambulance Levy:**

**How I do it:** Change the figure "7" between the words "Sheet" and "Government" to an ampersand "&".

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Subjective Comment:-

Not all sections of the manual have been addressed, basically because it is not my job to undertake such a task and I do consider that my time is valuable to me, as it is to every other person. In fact, I should not have had to undertake any of this task. I would expect there are people within QFRS/DES who receive a handsome remuneration to undertake such a task and I am disappointed that they have neglected both their duties and their obligations.

It would also appear to me that the Commissioner has been negligent as evidenced by the "Commissioner's Foreword" in the manual.

The Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations is in a similar position, as evidenced in his "introduction".

Both refer to the contributions that a large number of people have made to the development of this new manual, yet the quantum of the errors seem to belie these statements, **and I find it difficult to comprehend** that many people are supposed to have contributed, with this document as the end result.

Even more concerning is the possibility that neither the Commissioner nor the Assistant Commissioner, Rural Operations have any real understanding of many of the matters that are contained within this manual.

The information is not easy to understand and use, except, perhaps, for the initiated few.

Far too much of this manual appears to be an adaptation from Urban Policies and Procedures and has little relevance for the true Rural Fire Brigades, their operations and their volunteers, but does appear to be directed mainly at i-Zone Brigades.

**It also appears to me that rural brigades are expected to become de-facto urban brigades so that many of the high costs associated with urban brigades can be avoided by the use of volunteers.**

Perusal of the parent Act reveals that Rural Volunteers appear to have **NO** legal protection - only Officers of Rural brigades and Urban brigades receive protection, despite continuing advice to the contrary. This may also apply to ALL volunteers under the DES umbrella.

If QFRS continues on the path of following the models adopted by southern states, then I can see many more people losing their property and, worst of all, their lives - application of Urban procedures to a rural environment is a recipe for disaster.

Additional Comment 29 August 2008 - The requirement for Criminal History check upon new members appears discriminatory, especially as existing members are currently exempt whilst they remain with their current Brigade. It further implies that a landholder of a substantial area of rural land (who may have a past criminal history [perhaps from fishing in a prohibited zone on the Great Barrier reef or other closed area]) is not a fit and proper person to be part of the community effort in property protection. He may well be an extremely experienced fire-fighter and an invaluable member of a brigade but will be excluded from volunteering. In sparsely occupied rural areas every available person **will** be needed in the event of a major bushfire. It is ludicrous to think otherwise and demonstrates a complete lack of awareness and understanding of rural fires. Does a person's exclusion from membership also extend to directions by the Commissioner pursuant to S. 87 (2) (e) of the Act?

Further to the Criminal History check and a proposed volunteer's supposed application "for a position of trust" and the indemnity for any incompetence by the Police Department, I suspect that this will further aggravate the lack of availability of new members and appears to be more about a "fishing expedition". Are all Urban Fire Brigade members and full time staff of Rural Operations currently subject to such check? If not, why not? They are in much greater positions of trust than a rural landowner.

The standard of training that is provided appears to be based upon an Urban model where fire is generally located within a static environment and there appears (to me) to be a grave misunderstanding of rural fires - recent observations of incompetence and lack of respect for both landowners and for property safety on a "training day/controlled burn" have reinforced this view. Training documentation would tend to confirm this observation. The much vaunted "rule of law" appears to be ignored by certain sections of the RFB community and provisions contained within the Manual & Act conveniently overlooked.

Additional Comment 26 November 2008: Group formation and operation seems to be a personal fiefdom for a few select people - Fitzroy group hasn't (as noted during past attendance) observed the requirements of the enabling segment of the Brigade Manual or Group Constitution. Both Fitzroy and Keppel Groups appear to operate with "Management Committees", contrary to the requirements of their enabling Constitution - why should a rural brigade be part of such a Group if the provisions of the Group Constitution are continually ignored and why can the Area Director call a special meeting of a Group when he is not empowered to so do?

THERE ARE NO FURTHER COMMENTS OR OBSERVATIONS IN THIS DOCUMENT. Page 9 of 9, excluding any covering letter.

12 HOURS TO COMPILE ON 9 NOVEMBER 2007, with an additional 75 hours spent trying to find (sometimes unsuccessfully) information and documents, on the internet & at the Supreme Court library, for reference purposes, re-reading the original Fire Service Act 1990 and some subsequent amendments as well as re-checking current documents and Acts and making any necessary alterations and additions to this critique.

## Annexure C - Cover Sheet.

This document is provided to enable the committee to understand that QFRS appears to have in place a long term policy that is in conflict with the provisions of the Fire and Rescue Service Act (and the predecessors of such Act).

At a public meeting held at Alton Downs hall on the morning of 22 February 2009 (to discuss a proposed blanket rural fire levy over the whole of the Rockhampton Regional Council area), the Regional Manager - Rural Operations Central region, QFRS (Superintendent John Fisher) stated that rural brigades were only in existence to service the needs of the Local Authority (or words to that effect).

He was advised, in no uncertain terms, that rural brigades are there to primarily serve their local community and then the wider community (NOT the local council) and that we are all volunteers, not paid employees.

As well as members of numerous brigades, Mayor Brad Carter of Rockhampton Regional Council and the Member for Mirani (Ted Malone, MP) were also present.

Television footage of the meeting (unedited) should also be in existence, as should radio broadcasts and even emails and other communications.

# CQ firefighters want management change

*Posted Thu Aug 12, 2004 11:06am AEST*

**The Central Queensland Rural Fire Service is working towards having a local government approach to fire management.**

District Inspector of Rural Fire Services Laurie Colgrave says firefighters need to start working towards shire control instead of just servicing their brigade area.

Mr Colgrave says between The Caves and Marlborough there are low resources, so the need for rural fire brigades in the shire to work together in the event of a fire is even greater.

"There are hot spots where we don't have enough equipment or the community isn't ready for further equipment or there aren't enough people," he said.

"So therefore equipment is restricted because of that."

**Tags:** emergency-planning, rockhampton-4700

## Annexure D - Cover Sheet.

This Letter to the Editor was never printed.

Usually, letters may be (sometimes severely) edited, before publication, but not even that was done in this instant.

There is in existence a large body of data that would substantiate most, if not all, of such letter.

It appears that this letter (and perhaps the covering letter that accompanied it) was actually passed on to QFRS in Rockhampton.

One indicator was that, shortly after the letter was mailed, a radio technician was suddenly undertaking checking and repairing of QFRS radio repeaters (yet it was well known that some repeaters had been malfunctioning for many weeks) - when the Firecom operator said that she received him "loud and clear" he specifically requested a numerical designation on his transmission - this is unusual, as far as their normal radio checking procedures are concerned.

There was also a sudden flurry of activity with vehicles from all over the central area being taken in for radio checking and repair.

It would appear that there was a concerted effort by a number of parties, in collusion, to ensure as little information as possible was made available to the general public via media outlets.



Sir,

When is the major public inquiry into the recent fires at Rockhampton and environs to be announced, and will it be independent, headed by the likes of Fitzgerald? Internal would be a complete white wash, and the perceived incompetence during the recent fires needs to be aired in the public domain so that members of the public are no longer deceived by deliberately misleading statements and "spin".

Do nothing now and an even worse fire will eventuate at some future time - not because of "global warming" (a favourite, much abused, excuse), but through sheer incompetence & lack of foresight. This doesn't just apply to Central Qld, but is, I suspect, a statewide problem.

The whole structure, philosophy & incompetence of QFRS actually needs to be the subject of a Royal Commission with very wide powers, but I doubt the current government would have the will or the intestinal fortitude to allow same.

Residents of the North Rockhampton suburbs need to be very aware that QFRS had obviously decided, by 12 October, to sacrifice many of the homes fringing bush land.

What many would NOT be aware of was that such decision to take no preventative action (in the days after the Emu Park Road fire of 9 October escaped into the Berserker Range) would have been made at ROCC & ICC level, fully endorsed by their masters in Brisbane.

Was this inaction part of some grand "master plan" to put the fear of fire into the community, or was it simply gross incompetence bordering upon criminal negligence?

Where were all the hazard reduction burns that should have taken place at appropriate times during March to April (cool burns) or August/September (mostly hotter burns) to protect the community and the environment? No fuel, no fire - a forgotten, but very important principle.

There was more than ample time on 10th & 11th to construct a fire break on the western side of the range, from Emu Park Road to Yeppoon Road, or around the foot of the range (where or as needs be), and there were subsequently two perfect nights for conducting back burns off such a break (or even off a wallaby pad) - the loss of a home and the damage to various properties & livestock did not need to happen - AT ALL!

Why do none of the people in charge apparently understand the intricacies of fighting fire with fire? A bush fire is not a house fire, but it seems many in charge don't know the difference.

A Lack Of experience & knowledge is a dangerous thing in fire fighting.

Why were so many Urban fire crews unable to find Peltophorum Street & other nearby streets on 17th?

This is part of their area, yet they can't find their way around - WHY NOT?

This is not an isolated incident, and it appears many crews have little local knowledge.

Surely an important part of their training would be familiarization with their area of primary responsibility?

Are many of the Urban fire trucks unable to be effectively utilized in some of the newer subdivisions bordering bushland & have the supervisors ever bothered to inspect such areas for any future difficulties, especially with multiple vehicle attendance?

How efficient and effective were the fire spotter and the water bombers - were they utilized at maximum efficiency or were the poor pilots tasked on many occasions, by the fire spotter/controller, to drop their loads in the incorrect places?

Why is Firecom seemingly so incompetent on anything other than a "quiet" day?

Why does Firecom not have at least one operator tasked to stay in contact (or exclusively available for same) with personnel on a major fire ground AT ALL TIMES - failure to do so needlessly places lives in danger, especially when radio communications are less than desirable (as on the afternoon of 17th, when appliances & fire fighters on the ground were left without radio communications for far too long in the face of a rapidly advancing fire front). Or are all fire fighters on a fire ground "expendable"?

Why are so many radios (including Firecom and the repeaters) apparently not working efficiently? Too many users either don't know or aren't aware of the shortcomings of their transceivers and antennas.

Firecom advises far too many callers that their radio messages are unreadable, when in actual fact the signal is 5 by 7 in old radio language (clear and reasonably strong, albeit through a repeater).

Why do the Firecom operators appear to lack necessary local knowledge & continually give poor directions for access to incidents as well as continually failing to pass on all relevant information pertaining to an incident?

Why does Firecom call out rural brigades to rural fires from some distance & time away, yet they will totally ignore neighbouring brigades that can be on scene in only minutes? Is this some form of "exclusion", being practiced to the detriment of the community?

Why can a Rural crew turn out 1 and 1, but an Urban crew can not, and must wait for further crew - surely they could at least attend the site of the fire to relay relevant fire information to better assist the decision making process, and, if it is only a small fire put the darned thing out before it escalates into a larger, possibly uncontrollable fire? (There are the noted odd exceptions, like a reignited, burning stump in a school ground).

Why were so many Rural brigade areas left without immediate & effective protection during many of these recent fires, and when fires eventually started crews apparently unfamiliar with the area were tasked and couldn't even find their way to the fire?

Why did so many fires that were supposedly contained and extinguished reignite and jump containment lines - are there some very basic actions not being undertaken because of lack of knowledge & experience?

Why are there so many urban & ex-Urban "wannabes" running around in charge of various facets of rural operations, and, for that matter, why are there so many rural "wannabes" popping up everywhere - are there only a few competent, experienced rural fire fighters left and have many "opted out", in disgust at the emasculation of what was once a very effective and proud service, or have they been "sidelined" because they dare to speak out about the lack of competence of so many within the system?

Why have so many rural fire brigades gone from having large, active memberships (all residents within a brigade area used to be eligible for membership) to being on the verge of collapse through lack of members - it wouldn't have anything to do with the way the QFRS Commissioner and his underlings have managed to arrange things, would it?

Why does it appear that there are many latent firebugs within QFRS, using their positions to legally light fires, often at the most inappropriate time of day and without due diligence? These people are a danger to their fellow fire fighters (who should know better, but many apparently don't) and to the community.

People really need to understand that the QFRS structure is about a pyramid of power based upon a lack of openness and accountability - a centralization of power within the hands of a select few with total control over every fire brigade, fire fighter and their equipment BUT HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT FIRE CONTROL AND PROTECTION OF THE COMMUNITY - they really couldn't care less!

Only the actual fire fighters on the ground are the ones who really do care and who put in so much effort, in most instances. Most volunteers participate out of a sense of "duty" to their less fortunate or able fellow man, (often to their detriment) whilst there are others, unfortunately, who are participating mainly for the power and glory.

There appears to be far too much "political patronage" and appointment of "mates" into many positions within QFRS (both Urban & Rural) - observed competence is neglected and incompetence is conveniently overlooked, provided those people appear to be of the "select" grouping.

No doubt the next step in the "grand master plan" is to do away with Fire Wardens and centralize that function in the hands of a select few who wouldn't understand vegetation types, topography or even know where an application for a permit related to, other than on a map.

Further insane stupidity similar to the idea that people with more ego than experience can sit in an air-conditioned office or a tent, well away from the fire-ground, and make efficient and effective decisions for controlling a fire - it didn't work in Victoria and it didn't work here.

At present the warden is the only safeguard a community has against permit fires being lit at inappropriate times and places.

The Commissioner and his underlings have a lot to answer for, as do our politicians - "spin" doesn't substitute for competence, knowledge and experience and the efficient and effective care by all brigades, to the best of their ability, for their respective communities, as well as assisting other brigades in their time of need.

B Lund  
Ridgeland