

15 APR 2010

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND  
PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

5 April 2010

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

Dear Sir

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

After consultation with and on behalf of fellow members of the Croftby/Carneys Creek Rural Fire Brigade, I would like to submit our response to the issues raised by Management of Rural Fire Service in Queensland Discussion Paper, November 2009.

**Terms of Reference**

**Is the current model of Rural Fire Brigades suitable?**

- Our members felt that the current running of Rural Fire Brigade is excellent at ground level using the established office bearers of Chairperson, Secretary/Treasurer, First Officer, Second Officer etc. However it is felt that the upper administration is too remote and had no concept of needs of the actual local brigades.
- Communication between the Group and Area needs to be greatly improved with very little evidence of any between the two coming back to the local brigade. Often information (e.g. minutes of AGM, Annual Financial Reports and Audits, Membership details etc) which is required by the QFRS Area is sent by each brigade as requested, but the Group does not receive this vital information about the local rural fire brigades from QFRS Area. Instead it has to request it again from each brigade. This is a double up of the same information which should be shared.
- Often brigades receive the same communication twice from both Area and Group – again doubling up of the information required.

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

- Our members felt that it was important to keep the current model of funding as is with local government control, passed out by Group with payment made by landowners with their rates. This allows the monies to stay in the district. It was strongly felt that it should not become a state tax.
- The current model of allocating funds according to number and type of fire fighting units used by each brigade is preferable to the proposed change where each brigade has to put in a proposed budget and 3 year plan as things may change according to events which may happen through the year i.e. severe fire season, equipment replacement and maintenance etc. Brigades with larger vehicles and sheds obviously need more money than those with mop up units on private vehicles.

- It needs to be noted that each brigade has its own requirements according to number of members and areas of different types of terrain which they are responsible for. A blanket approach of 1 size fits all will not suit every brigade's individual needs.

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

- Urban encroachment is having a very large impact on Rural Fire Brigades. Smaller blocks owned by a larger number of people makes fighting fires harder to control. Owners on life-style blocks are often not permanent residents and are harder to contact with gates often being locked and more fences to go through. Properties are often not maintained properly for fire as new owners often need better understanding of obligations for fire control. It has been suggested that education is needed on burning appropriately and perhaps this could be done via the local government with mail outs in rates notices etc.

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

- The increasing amount of "red-tape" and need for accountability is putting more pressure on brigades which have already been running successfully for a number of years. In close knit communities, there is an existing understanding between rural fire brigade members and local knowledge is valued and shared. We don't want to see a repeat of what happened in Victoria with residents unable to burn off due to regulations put on them by higher authorities. It must be realised that fire can be friendly and if used properly can assist the land owner. It is more difficult to control on unmanaged larger blocks with inaccessible areas.

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

- Each brigade is already accountable for its own financial records which are sent in annually to QFRS for review. It must be remembered that Rural Fire Brigades are made up from volunteers who give their time freely and unselfishly in order to keep brigades running according to each local area's needs. If too much pressure regarding accountability comes from higher administration, then volunteers may not be as willing to provide their services as they may not be seen as valued. This would undermine the concept of Rural Fire Brigades as it exists now.

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

- The local fire warden plays a vital part of the Rural Fire Brigade and should be part of the rural fire brigade in order to keep in touch with the local area. The increasing demands on the local fire warden is not making the job any easier and it was felt that the appointment of a deputy fire warden would be useful in the cases where the first fire warden were not available due to other commitments. This means the work load could be shared. Fire wardens already attend Group meetings as well as Rural Fire Brigade meetings and care should be taken not to over regulate volunteers.

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

- Remember that many Rural Fire Brigades are self sustaining already – HANDS OFF! Give people credit for local knowledge and ability to manage own fire brigade.

- We suggest that National Parks burn at other times of the year when conditions suit not just when it is normally done. If done then not so much man power is required to control burns.
- Application forms for fire permits need to be available via email so that permits can be issued more quickly and made readily available for when small windows of opportunity exist. This would make life much easier for fire warden and land owner alike.

These issues raised much discussion at our recent 3 monthly meeting and the above points were recorded as our response to the Discussion Paper. Thank you for giving us at ground level the opportunity to provide feedback regarding a very important community identity which provides a very valuable service manned by local volunteers— the Rural Fire Brigade.

Yours sincerely on behalf of the Croftby/Carney's Creek Rural Fire Brigade,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris White', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chris White  
Secretary/Treasurer  
Croftby/Carney's Creek Rural Fire Brigade.

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