

RURAL FIRES ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND

INCORPORATED UNDER ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION ACT 1981. CERT No. 1239

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PATRON:

To the Queensland Public Accounts and Public Works Committee: –

“Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland”

The submission has been put forward from the above-mention association with the hope that this committee will look at and discuss the issues raised by the association and hopefully act on the same.

Background; On the 1st July 1990 the Qld Fire Brigades Act and the Qld Rural Fires Act were repealed, they were then replaced with the Qld Fire service act 1990.

The major political parties at that time- the Labor, Liberal & National parties all agree with that course of action.

This effectively meant approximately 80 Urban and 1 Rural Fire Boards were disbanded and replaced with a Fire Officer administrator with a Fire Commissioner (Mr Wally Belcher) as the Officer in Charge for all Queensland's fire services.

The Rural Fire section of the overall new service was allowed to carry on as per normal operations with an assistant commissioner responsible for daily administration and an Advisory Rural Fires council was created to assist government with Rural Fire matters.

While this action was carried out in “good faith” it actually increased the “them and us” mentality that existed before the Boards were disbanded.

Current position; in the almost 20 years since its inception the current fire model has seen many changes with the introduction of the “statutory fire levy” for some rural areas, first refurbished but now new fire appliances for rural fire brigades and an ever increasing growth of the rural residential development. This has created an administration called the “Izone” with urban and rural fire components trying to work in closer harmony. However once again, all this action taken in “good faith” has done is to continue and actually increase the “them and us” mentality.

The Rural Fires Advisory Council was a “Toothless Tiger” and recently was dissolved and the new Emergency Services Advisory Council was formed which is also another “Toothless Tiger”. Running alongside this action the Rural Fire Brigades Association has developed into a large administrative body which represents volunteers. It has become an embarrassment spending much of its time making phone calls to places like Brisbane residents asking for donations and trying to sell raffle tickets. This association is funded by the Queensland government with large salaries paid to senior administrators; this action is a complete contrast to the word “Volunteer”.

The Queensland Fire & Rescue Service is administered by a Commissioner, 7 Assistant Commissioners who collectively cover the state, but are only responsible for Urban fires, plus 1 Assistant Commissioner for Rural Fires who has a state wide responsibility, this model is well out dated.

Recommendations & Issues:

1. The Queensland Government provide stronger legislation that deals with illegally lit fires and fire hazards. No issues
2. The Queensland Fire & Rescue Service disbands the Rural Fire component and places it under the 7 (so called) Urban Asst Commissioners. No issues
3. The Commissioner and 7 asst Commissioners must have practical experience in ALL facets of fire fighting from Urban High Rise to Grass fires.
 - This issue will have an enormous effect on the troops both urban and rural “one boss no division”
4. Government funding to the Rural Fire Brigades Association must cease.
5. All Queenslanders pay a Fire Levy which must be on a sliding scale. IE: the greater the risk the higher the levy. It must also be flexible to cater of “Change” such as higher, lower or no levy for specific persons / properties. The levy is to be collected by councils.
 - In an urban area the levy is collected by the council and given to the state government for distribution.
 - In adjacent rural areas and in the same council area the levy is given to the Rural Fire Brigades or their respective Group. Sometimes these monies are misused – excessive purchasing of non required equipment, monies hoarded and not given to those brigades that need it, or some brigades in the southern areas of the state having huge masses of money in the bank in excess of \$70,000.
6. Part of the levy must be paid to “Fire Wardens” who control Fire Ignition and Fire Hazards.
 - The local Fire Warden is the most important person in the Qld Fire and rescue service for rural areas. He/she is the pre fire expert and this is where the service must direct 80% of its attention NOT fire suppression (It’s too late after the fire starts). The Fire Warden must be paid an annual amount each year in return for this remuneration the Fire Warden would report monthly to the relevant Asst Commissioner. The duties and reports should cover Permits issued, Permits refused, Action taken to abate fire hazards (both private and crown land), reporting of fuel loads and potential fire hazards.
7. Every council must employ at least one (1) Emergency Services Officer whose responsibilities include Urban & Rural Fire incidents and enquiries, SES, Flood, Animal Disease and Bush Fire Planning.
 - Once again this would be a huge benefit to not only the councils themselves but the Department of Community Safety as well.
8. All QFRS trucks are to be one colour.
9. Coordination of all Rural Fire Planning and Fire Hazards is the responsibility of the relevant Assistant Commissioner for any region and his or her delegated authority.

Conclusion

The Rural Fires Association Queensland Inc (RFAQ), was Founded in 1982 to act as and advisory body to the then Rural Fires Advisory Council, the Queensland Fire Service and State and Local Governments on matters pertaining to Rural Fires in Queensland. It membership consists of serving Urban and Rural Fire Officers, past Senior members of the Rural Fires Service, Bush Fire mitigation planning officers and other interested members of the public.

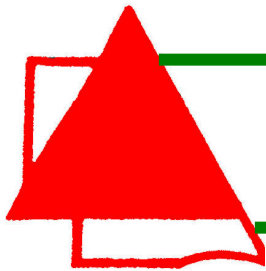
Our association is at the forefront of Rural Fires issues in Queensland and keeps abreast of matter of a similar type across Australia.

We hope that this submission is read in full and that all matters raised in this document are brought before and acted on in parliament.

Regards

B S Beasley

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Bruce S Beasley
Secretary
Rural Fires Association Qld Inc.



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Attachment 1

RURAL FIRES ASSOCIATION of QUEENSLAND INC.

The RFAQ was founded in 1982 following a course at the Forestry training Centre in Gympie at which all Field Officers (Inspectors) of the then Rural Fires Board attended. The aim of the course was to establish a standard for Rural Fire Officers, and the formation of the Association was a natural progression from the aim.

The formation of the Association was sponsored by the Rural Fires Board and the Minister at the time, Mr Bill Hewitt MLA, who was interested enough to attend part of the course and to present certificates to those undertaking it.

In 1985 the Association was registered in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Act, which was then administered by the Justice Department, and the objectives as set out in the registered set of rules were:

“To provide an interested body for the study of the roles and functions of rural fire services in Queensland and the promotion and advancement of professional standards in this and associated services”.

The Constitution was amended in 2003 to reflect changes in the role of the Association. New objectives are:

- “To promote and advance and monitor the professional standards, roles and functions of rural fire services in Queensland;
- To provide advice, input, solicit and lobby state and local government and industry on rural fire risk management including preparedness, prevention and response strategies at micro and macro levels;
- To monitor and liaise with rural fire research organisations both nationally and internationally and to promote research findings into active and proactive rural fire management strategies as best practice.

The term “rural fire” shall include any bush, grass or vegetation fire incident in the state of Queensland and any structural, vehicle, gas, hazardous chemical and bulk fuel storage fire incident in rural Queensland.”

The Association has the capacity to act as an advisory body and to address any other activity within its charter. Membership is maintained by the private subscription of members, i.e. a joining fee and variable annual subscription according to membership level.

The Association has, at Government request, made submissions in the case of the Revision of Fire Services in 1989 and the Public Sector Management Commission Review of the Bureau of Emergency Services in 1993. With some financial help from the Queensland Tertiary Education Foundation and the official support and approval of the Queensland Fire Service, the Association supported the development of a formal course in Rural Fire Management by the University of Southern Queensland. Several members of the Association contributed written material for inclusion in the course.

The Association is also officially recognised by, and has made contribution on bushfire matters to, the Forestry and Forest Products Division of CSIRO. It is also recognised and supported by the Director General, Department of Emergency Services and the Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Originally comprised of career officers of the Rural Fires Board in 1982, the Association has now expanded with an imposing list of members with rural fire management expertise. These include present and past officers of the Rural Fire Service including former Chief Executive Officers and Commissioners, former Board members, Senior and Regional Inspectors, District Inspectors, District Training Officers, Fire Protection Officers of the Department of Primary Industries (Forestry), Urban Fire Service staff, prominent members of many volunteer Rural Fire Brigades, Fire Wardens, professionals in private fire management consultancy and representatives of Local Government and Queensland Rail.

As is evident from this membership profile there is an enormous depth of talent and pool of knowledge and experience in Rural Fire Management waiting to be tapped – A Sleeping Giant.

The Management Committee is continuously working on a series of Position Papers utilising some of that knowledge and experience. Documented items concurrently include:

- Continued use of fire for land management and fire hazard reduction strategies
- Greater emphasis on aerial suppression strategies using local, national and international technology with a policy for cost sharing by all stakeholders
- Renewed emphasis on the use of aerial ignition as a strategic hazard reduction tool for broad scale burning over vast land tracts and identified environmentally sensitive ecosystem protection
- Smoke pollution and nuisance policies and strategies associated with the use of fire as a land management tool, with particular emphasis on hazard reduction and abatement practices, and the consequential benefits in reducing pollutant concentrations from extensive and/or intensive wildfires
- Legislation to support the use of fire for land management purposes such as woody weed control, ecosystem/habitat modification, crop pre- and post-harvesting, pasture rejuvenation and fire hazard abatement
- Training of staff and fire fighters at all levels in all facets of fire application, fire science, fire suppression strategies and incident management, and maintaining skill competency
- Use of satellite based Global Positioning Systems, interfaced with Local Government and/or Natural Resource land tenure databases, to assist in identifying fire hazardous tenures requiring issue of hazard abatement notices.

Other issues, and indeed initiatives, are on the Management Committee's agenda for future development.

The Association invites current and past personnel of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and other interested persons who are not already members to consider making application for membership. QFRS personnel include volunteers, auxiliaries and career officers. Applications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr Bruce Beasley, 39 Farrell Drive, Walloon Q 4306.

Accredited members are entitled to use the acronym MRFAQ after their name.

With the existing membership and an influx of new members, the Association is poised to play a significant role in the advancement of Rural Fire Management in Queensland. You are invited to be part of that exciting future.