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Sent: Friday, April 16, 2010 4:03 PM
To: Public Accounts and Public Works Committee
Subject: Submission from CANEGROWERS Babinda

Submission for the **Review of Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland**

CANEGROWERS Babinda consider that the current model of Rural Fire Brigades works well across the district and therefore should be maintained in its present form. Local District Brigades have loyal support from not only landholders but local residents willing to help in an emergency.

When Country Cabinet met in the North last month, eleven volunteers from the Babinda Area alone, were awarded long service medals ranging from 25 to 30 years service. This bares testament to the success of the present system.

Is the existing model, including resource allocation appropriate?

The list of subsidized equipment made available to volunteer brigades has been reduced dramatically over the past few years, despite regular requests from branches to reinstate some items. It may be necessary to maintain different subsidised equipment for different areas across the state. Equipment appropriate to fire fighting in a particular area needs to be made available and subsidised accordingly.

Trash and cane fires require a very fast response and for this reason galvanised water tankers [trailers] need to be housed in several locations within each brigade area

Rural Brigade volunteers (the men at the fire front) should have a voice on any budget or funding committee.

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

- Limited urban encroachment is being experienced in the area.

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

Although only limited urban encroachment has been experienced, it would be helpful to local brigades if a standard information pack was mailed to all new landholders by Local Government making the landholder aware of the existence of the brigades. In busy times fire wardens are not always aware of land sales.

Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate?

- Accountability should not be a problem if the documented procedures are followed. A strengthening of the link between the individual rural brigades and the Area Director could prove beneficial.

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

- The role should remain as is. These wardens are local landholders who in most instances have farmed the areas for decades. They know the local terrain, understand the local weather conditions and are respected and experienced members of the local brigade and have no hesitation in saying no when conditions dictate. Most have been in the role for many years with no major rotation of wardens being experienced.

It is essential that the decentralised system of fire wardens along with the present permit system be retained within the cane areas.

Other relevant matters:

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The requirements for Rural Fire Services in the Wet Tropics would vary greatly from the needs of other brigades across the state. For this reason, it is disappointing that the committee set up to consider submissions, review and evaluate the management of Rural Fire Services does not have balanced representation drawn from across the State.

Regards
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