

Habana & Districts Progress Association Inc



ABN 23811853775

President: Peter Attard
Phone: 07 49598548

Treasurer: Judy Atkins
Phone: 07 49598885

All Correspondence to:
The Secretary,
Lesley Vardanega,
PO Box 8567
MT PLEASANT Q 4740

E-Mail: domlavee@easynet.net.au

April 15th, 2010
The Research Director,
Public Accounts & Public works Committee,
Parliament House,
George Street,
Brisbane, Q. 4000

Re:Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland

Ms Jeffrey,

H&DPA inc on behalf of the community of Habana, via Mackay 4740, welcomes your report that certain areas of Rural Fire Services can be improved.

There are 2 parts to our submission to your report:

- #1: We stress that for the report to be accurate it is obliged to include a brief of Queensland's rural fire history including its system of Fire warden /Permit to Light Fire of which we include reference to our specific location
- #2: We note that according to your findings the threat to the current system's effectiveness lies mainly in administrative deficiency.

#1 Queensland's Unique Fire Circumstance/History

It is a fact that vast areas of Queensland's rural community utilise over a century's experience of 'putting in safe, precise 'burns' [fires]' via the Cane Farming Industry. Indeed, Queensland's good track record with bush fire is in great part due to this wealth of inherent practical knowledge of local terrain with its relationship to fire, & application thereof. Queensland is historically, nationally well known for its regular back burn / burn off methods, which correlate with ancient indigenous practices of the controlled burning of the land in order to preserve & regenerate flora and fauna.

Our committee emphatically concurs with the Director-General, Department of Emergency Services' acknowledgement within your report, of "the role of the 'Permit to Light Fire System & 2650 volunteer Fire Wardens in mitigating the impacts of bushfire ..."[pg3]. H&DPA inc categorically maintains that local fire wardens are equipped to make the call as

.../-2

to whom warrants a permit as a result of their completing fire safety training to attain the position, participating in regular training sessions with rural brigades comprising their own & at times other district brigades, & their residence in & association with the community. In our experience fire wardens responsibly exercise their duty to issue fire permits with accuracy. Our community is adamant that fire wardens have proven through a successful track record that they should continue to do so at their discretion. Our view is that, notwithstanding the current system's flaws, it is of paramount significance that your report gives due credence to Queensland's unique good record of fire safety which was won through implementing this system. It is a record that in any court would be testimony to its success.

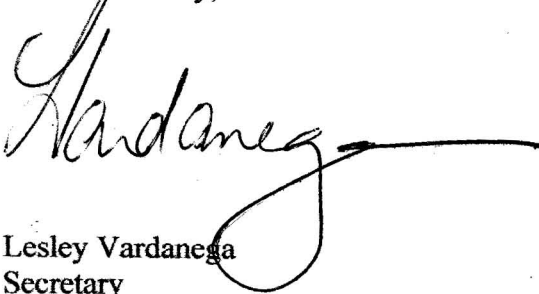
#2. Compliance/Administrative Obligations

We thank you for revealing the need for better reporting and communication between Rural Fire Brigades & QFRS Rural Division. As they are volunteers, Habana Rural Fire Brigade's members have limited time, which dictates that they must prioritise practical training, the maintenance of equipment, fundraising, all while assisting landowners to protect their property through controlled 'burns'. We suggest that the future reporting/compliance mechanism must be a streamlined system accompanied by a workable solution perhaps with your recommendation for paid help with same. To advise a heavier workload without accompanying help to complete the extra tasks would be counterproductive to our Rural Fire Brigade's successful operations. It could have the potential to compromise the function of the Rural Fire Services through decreased membership. Indeed we have received feedback to this nature, from within the brigade's ranks. If membership diminishes, the ensuing centralisation of our district's fire brigades could only bring greater exposure to fire threat. We hold that an imperfect reporting system of fire mitigation is preferable any day to a perfect report of a fire tragedy!

In closing:

H&DPAinc has earnestly deliberated your discussion paper, gleaned response from our community & the result is that we implore the Auditor-General to thoroughly consider that because Queensland is a large state of > 1.8 million km² of diverse environments populated unevenly with people & activity, vegetation & fauna, it is critical that generalisations are avoided in order that Rural Fire operations are facilitated, not thwarted, bureaucratically. Further-your submission to parliament must be vigilant so as recommend change for better compliance & communication without jeopardising the influence of local knowledge of the area. This local insight is indispensable to the continued effectiveness & future enhancement of Queensland's sound fire safety strategy.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Vardanega', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lesley Vardanega
Secretary