



Southern Downs
REGIONAL COUNCIL

**Please address all
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Our Ref: AI:JMC

19 April 2010

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

Dear Ms Jeffrey

Queensland Rural Fire Service Review

I refer to the Public Accounts and Public Works Committee's current inquiry into the Management of Rural Fire Services in Queensland. I wish to offer the following comments in relation to the matters relevant to the inquiry's terms of reference.

The Current Model

The local management and coordination responsibility should remain with local brigades to prevent dilution of local ownership and accountability. If this structure changed it could result in less volunteer participation in local brigades. The volunteers are the strength of rural fire brigades and every effort should be made to continue to encourage participation which should include local management and accountability ie locals doing it for themselves.

Funding

Funding has seen huge progress over the last decade and hopefully this will be maintained. Many brigades are now fairly well resourced with sheds and equipment based throughout the region. There are still some brigades yet to benefit from these initiatives but if the programs are maintained, these resources should be applied equitably over time. However, in time it will more than likely be necessary to start a plant replacement program within the brigade to avoid the problems previously experienced.

The current system seems to recognise brigades in higher risk areas have a higher funding priority. Therefore resources seem to have been applied accordingly. This works effectively and should continue. The funding model also allows for local coordination between brigades and local government to increase funding where there is a demonstrable need for additional funding. This approach should also continue.



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Encroachment of urban area

There has been some progress in relation to better planning and building controls in relation to fire hazards for new dwellings. In the Southern Downs region, it is believed that this is not a result of urban encroachment but more related to residential lifestyle choices in highly desirable rural landscape areas that are also often high risk fire areas. This could be assisted with tighter state controls supporting the efforts of local government planning and building enforcement regimes requiring more effort on the part of landholders as to where and how their home is built in rural areas, particularly in high risk areas.

It would also be helpful if resources and/or legislative support were available to retrospectively attend to the historic problems where people live in high risk areas and in some occasions without appropriate personal risk management plans and infrastructure such as appropriate on site water storage that rural brigades can connect to. This is also relevant to areas around homes and other buildings that are appropriately cleared in addition to having an emergency evacuation plan in the event that the primary access is cut off due to fire. Funding relating to local groups being able to support residents in these areas would be beneficial in reducing the risk in the event of an emergency.

Fire Wardens

It is suggested that the role of Fire Wardens should be changed so that it has more of a direct link with the rural brigades to prevent some of the current communication issues which are being experienced locally.

Should you require further information in relation to this matter, please contact Council's Governance Officer Jody Collins on 07 4661 0377.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Ireland
Director Corporate Services