



## Tablelands Regional Council

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

Dear Ms D Jeffery

### MANAGEMENT OF RURAL FIRE SERVICES IN QUEENSLAND

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the operations and management of Rural Fire Services in our Region. My comments are placed in the order set out in your discussion paper and are limited to the operations of rural fire services in the Tablelands Region.

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

The current model is a working one. Most of these Brigades have raised funds, bought equipment and built sheds to house that equipment. Some of the equipment and sheds have been subsidized by both Local and State Governments. These Brigades are part of the community and draw their membership from the same community. The membership and drive to develop the Brigades varies from area to area depending on the make up of the various communities and their willingness to participate.

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

Council currently has two methods of funding for Rural Brigades. For the Brigades in the old Herberton Shire area there is a direct donation from Council and in the remaining areas of the region Council collects a levy on behalf of the Brigades and passes this on to the Brigades. The levies vary based on what is needed by the Brigades for equipment and capital works and the levy is agreed at a public meeting and negotiated with Council. Council does not receive any remuneration for this administrative work.

Council is also aware that Brigades enlist the assistance of Gaming Funds and the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) as other sources of funding for vehicles, equipment and capital works. This does appear to be an unstructured approach to funding and leads to very different outcomes for the levels of funding and resources provided to Rural Fire Brigades.

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

Rural Fire Brigades report urban encroachment is having a massive effect in some areas where rural residential estates are established. These new residents do not pay a levy for service but expect one from Rural Brigades. A great number of these residents know very little or nothing about bushfires and have a reluctance to use hazard reduction burns as a method of mitigating major wildfires.

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

Rural Fire Brigades have differing increasing demands depending on local circumstances and population trends etc. Regional Councils should be liaising with Rural Fire Brigade Officers on access, water, power and fire breaks before subdivisions are approved. Councils should provide assistance in educating new residents of new subdivisions on fire management.

Local Councils know the Brigades in the regions and should be assisted by the State to oversee the operations of the Brigades. These Brigades should be fully supported by all levels of Government and local residents because of the vital work they carry out in Regional areas.

- ***Are the accountability mechanisms currently in place appropriate***

It is believed that more accountability should be built into the structure of funding for Rural Fire Brigades and copies of audited financial statements should be available to Councils before collected levies or donations are made. It is also important that financial affairs are controlled by the Brigades at a local level to retain a sense of ownership for the way finances are dealt with and allocated.

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

We feel that Fire Wardens should remain in the Brigade Areas with an Area Director as Chief Warden because

- they know the Area
- understand the conditions of that Area
- know when to approve permits.

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

The operation of Rural Fire Brigades should remain localised with support from the State Government as locals know the local conditions, they know the local people and what is the best way to control local wildfire events. Liaison with local fire wardens is also very necessary for the operation of Rural Fire Brigades.

Once again thank you for the opportunity of commenting on the management of Rural Fire Brigades and we look forward to receiving the outcomes of your deliberations.

Yours faithfully



**TIM O'BRIEN**  
**MANAGER PARKS AND CONSERVATION**