



The Honourable David Elliott MP

Minister for Corrections
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister for Veterans Affairs



DOC025884

Mr David Blunt
Clerk of the Parliaments
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Blunt,

I am pleased to enclose the NSW Government's response to the recommendations of the inquiry into the Wambelong fire that was undertaken by the Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee Number 5.

As indicated in my letters to you of 25 August and 11 September 2015, the Government considered the Committee's recommendations alongside the recommendations of the Coronial inquiry into the Wambelong fire, which were delivered by Deputy State Coroner Dillon on 28 September 2015. I am also pleased to enclose a copy of the Government's response to the Coroner's recommendations.

The responses to the Parliamentary and Coronial Inquiries set out a number of key initiatives being undertaken by the Government to strengthen NSW's already robust capability to prevent and respond to bushfires. I am pleased to note that these include our commitments to:

- introduce legislation to give the NSW Rural Fire Service the powers it needs to create an improved, standardised and integrated fire trail network across the state.
- deploy four new fire behaviour specialists and roll out new weather balloons and portable weather stations to allow the NSW Rural Fire Service to get on the spot assessments of atmospheric conditions on the front line of fire zones in regional areas, and
- engage 10 full-time mitigation crews to increase the level of hazard reduction work in NSW, supporting the work done by volunteers to deliver our commitment to protecting almost 600,000 homes and almost 750,000 hectares through hazard reduction activities by 2019.

I would like to once again commend the efforts of our frontline firefighters and all those who supported them through the fire and the recovery efforts that followed.

Yours sincerely



David Elliott MP
MINISTER FOR CORRECTIONS
MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES
MINISTER FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS

Received at 2:40pm
Thursday 31 March 2016





Response to recommendations of the Parliamentary and Coronial Inquiries into the Wambelong fire

Introduction

The NSW Government has carefully considered the recommendations arising from both the Parliamentary and Coronial Inquiries into the Wambelong fire. The attached table sets out the Government's response to the Parliamentary Inquiry's and the Coronial inquest's recommendations.

Of the 52 recommendations that have been made by both inquiries 42 are supported or supported in part by the NSW Government.

These include recommendations for a review of National Parks and Wildlife Service guidelines and protocols with respect to hazard reduction planning and burning off operations, as well as a review of its prescribed burns program to ensure as far as practicable that all necessary approvals for a prescribed burn are provided as promptly as possible (Recommendation 15 and 22 of the Coronial Inquiry).

Proposals for the implementation of a streamlined regulatory system for hazard reduction burns and greater accountability in relation to the implementation of bush fire risk management plans as a means of delivering more hazard reduction are already part of the NSW Rural Fire Service's standard practices for bush fire management across the State (Recommendation 4 of the Parliamentary Inquiry). The NSW approach to bush fire management has been noted and endorsed by the Independent Hazard Reduction Audit Panel as best practice.

Importantly, the NSW Government supports a number of key recommendations arising from both Inquiries which relate to improvements in NSW Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service's operational management. The attached table sets out the actions underway by the agencies to address these recommendations.

In February 2015, the NSW Government announced its commitment to giving the NSW Rural Fire Service the powers it needs to ensure that a strategic fire trail network across all tenures could be maintained in a way that provides for the safe and effective suppression of fires, and enable essential hazard reduction work to be carried out. The NSW Government is currently developing legislative amendments to facilitate an enhanced network of fire trails in NSW that will substantially assist the NSW Rural Fire Service and local communities to fight bush fires and undertake hazard reduction activities

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service consider proposing an arrangement with the Bureau of Meteorology to deploy weather balloons specifically for the purpose of assessing atmospheric instability during periods of severe to catastrophic fire danger in locations most likely to be severely affected, for example, areas in which a very high C-Haines index reading is registered and local fires have been identified.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Government will fund four regionally based weather balloon kits, portable weather stations and supporting vehicles to enhance the fire prediction capability at the most severe bush fires. This capability enhancement will allow weather balloons to be deployed to assess atmospheric instability during periods of severe to catastrophic fire danger in locations most likely to be affected. Data collected by weather balloons would then inform the preparation of aerological diagrams which provide a more sophisticated understanding of the atmosphere and are more useful for fire behaviour predictions.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>Alternatively, I recommend that the RFS consider developing such capacity to deploy weather balloons itself, in conjunction with mobile weather stations, for this purpose.</p>	
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service consider redrafting the disclaimer in its fire predictions to make abundantly clear where the potential errors or omissions may affect the prediction and how to detect them if they are there (for example, by comparing them with linescans) and what other factors (such as VLS) may affect the predictions and in what way.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has reviewed the disclaimer to make it clear that a risk of inaccuracy exists within the prediction report and map, and so should not be solely relied upon when making operational decisions. The disclaimer will also identify the limitations with the predictions report and potential sources of error.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service consider amending its fire prediction reports to include a checklist of significant factors that have not been able to be considered in the prediction model and a warning to be alert for them and seek intelligence on them from fire ground managers</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has reviewed the fire prediction reports and included a list of factors and assumptions used in developing the report. Incident Management Team personnel will be provided with training to improve their understanding and interpretation of information that the fire prediction reports may contain.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>That in Class 3 fire-fighting operations, the Rural Fire Service consider including a fire behaviour analyst in the incident management team if feasible.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Government will fund four additional regionally based Fire Behaviour Specialists for deployment to specific Incident Management Teams and prediction tool/s to be used near the fire ground to facilitate decision making and delivery of fire predictive maps.</p> <p>These additional resources will provide improved tools and personnel for the implementation of training programs, delivery of fire predictive maps and deployment of fire behaviour specialists to the most severe bush fires, whilst maintaining the State Operations strategic capability.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service consider extending pre-emptive section 44 to whole of Castlereagh RFS/Warrumbungle Shire area.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has an established readiness procedure which provides for escalating levels of readiness by NSW Rural Fire Service staff and volunteers as well as its fire fighting partner agencies. This procedure includes the assessment of a requirement for 'pre-emptive' section 44 declarations by the Commissioner of the NSW RFS, if required.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service together with other land managers develop a program whereby local stakeholders come together regularly (every 2 months during non-fire season and monthly during the fire season) to share intelligence and to consider hazard and incident management measures for implementation.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The NSW Government supports the principle of regular meetings with stakeholders. However, a 'one size fits all' meeting schedule for Bush Fire Management Committees would not be appropriate. Meetings are held as often as necessary, as determined by each Committee to meet its own local needs, and in response to prevailing conditions. The NSW Rural Fire Service will work with Bush Fire Management Committees to reinforce the need to adopt and monitor meeting schedules in light of circumstances and fire activity.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service consider adopting the approach to fire classification suggested by Mr Conway that 'classification and resourcing of the fire ground response and incident management capability should reflect the potential of the fire rather than observed fire behaviour'.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committees Policy, Management of Bushfire Operations, provides guidance on fire classification and notification requirements. The policy was reviewed and upgraded by the Committee on 24th July 2014, as a result of the Wambelong fire and incorporates these principles.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service introduce training, exercises or information packages, or other suitable forms of professional development, for operational fire fighters and analysts concerning the potential effects of atmospheric instability and vorticity-driven lateral spread on fire behaviours in severe-catastrophic fire danger conditions</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The Fire Weather Technical Group of the Australasian Fire Authorities Council is in the final stages of developing a National Fire Weather Training Course, which will contain comprehensive material dealing with atmospheric instability. Once it becomes available training, exercises and information packs will be developed and implemented.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 10</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service consider developing a land management policy that requires active engagement with property owners adjoining the Park to ensure that hazard reduction and asset protection is encouraged and undertaken before the bush fire season commences.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The Castlereagh Bush Fire Management Committee and its sub-committee already meet regularly to specifically review hazard reduction and fire trail management. This provides an all-tenures approach to risk assessment and treatment across the landscape, ensuring that all lands both public and private are considered. On that basis the proposal to introduce an additional policy framework for the national park is not required.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service consider amending their protocols for upgrading advices to higher levels to emphasise the significance and urgency of raising warning levels as soon as the potential dangers of fire to live or property materially increase.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has prepared a draft Operational Protocol for Public Information and Warnings, and associated training material and guidelines. This Protocol provides guidance to Incident Controllers about the need to assess the immediate or likely impact of a fire when assigning an alert level. The National Parks and Wildlife Service adopts NSW Rural Fire Service notification protocols.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12</p> <p>That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service review the procedures for requesting aerial support in 'severe' or worse fire conditions to ensure that delays in providing it are reduce to the minimum time possible.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has reviewed and confirmed procedures relating to requests for, and provision of, aerial support. The procedures will be reinforced to all agencies for dissemination among their Incident Management Teams to minimise any delays.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 13</p> <p>That the National Parks and Wildlife Service, in consultation with relevant local Council(s), devise a policy that enables the John Renshaw Parkway to be closed at either end of the Warrumbungle National Park during a bush fire in such a way that its closure would not impede access by emergency service vehicles into the park..</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service has no jurisdiction over public roads. However, on 27 October 2015 it met with Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Councils to discuss procedures for the closure of John Renshaw Parkway during bush fires. Gilgandra Shire Council has advised it will apply its Roads Closure Policy to the parkway during a bush fire event.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14</p> <p>That the National Parks and Wildlife Service consider incorporating ‘worst case scenario’ training, as proposed in Mr Conway’s report, in its suite of fire-fighting protocols, exercises and training packages for senior incident controllers and other senior managers</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>Incident prediction is a function captured within the Australian Interagency Incident Management System (AIIMS) framework. Incident prediction, including ‘worst case’ scenarios also forms part of formal Incident Management Team training, which is already delivered by multi-agency training teams from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Rural Fire Service and the Forestry Corporation of NSW.</p> <p>Additionally, the NSW Rural Fire Service has introduced a training program for senior incident controllers which includes “worst case” and “most likely” scenario planning as core content.</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service will continue to review and develop fire and incident management training programs. “Worst case” and “most likely” scenario planning will be incorporated into all relevant Units of Competency, particularly those related to the planning and incident controller roles.</p>

	Response
<p>Recommendation 15</p> <p>That the National Parks and Wildlife Service consider reviewing its guidelines and protocols in respect of hazard reduction planning and burning-off operations in the light of the evidence from expert witnesses in these proceedings that the incidence of, and intensity of, major fires is increasing and in the light of expert evidence given in these proceedings concerning the dangers of vorticity-driven lateral spread.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service has commenced a review of its fire management planning framework. The review, which will be undertaken in consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service, will examine ways to improve the planning and implementation of hazard reduction burns on National Parks and Wildlife Service managed land. A key focus will be addressing risks associated with the scale, occurrence and intensity of bushfires. A range of risk reduction strategies will be examined as part of this process.</p>
<p>Recommendation 16</p> <p>That the National Parks and Wildlife Service review its protocols for control of Class 1 fires under its control to ensure that incident controllers managing fires in 'severe' or worse fire conditions receive as much incident management planning support as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service will review its resourcing protocols to ensure that its officers are using them to access incident management planning support when required.</p>
<p>Recommendation 17</p> <p>That the National Parks and Wildlife Service review its procedures for monitoring Class 1 fires occurring in 'severe' or worse fire conditions that cannot be reconnoitred at ground level adequately due to terrain or dangerous conditions, and consider including aerial surveillance (if reasonably practicable) as a standard procedure in such circumstances.</p>	<p>Response: Support in Part</p> <p>The appropriate use of aerial surveillance as a component of bush fire response is supported, however active monitoring of bushfires, which includes reconnaissance, intelligence activity and aerial surveillance, is part of existing standard operating procedures for bush fire response. On that basis a review of procedures is not required.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 18</p> <p>That during periods of 'severe' or worse fire conditions, that the National Parks and Wildlife Service consider adopting a posture of pre-emptive planning and deployment of incident management teams in national parks similar to the manner in which the Rural fire Service does.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service arrangements for pre-emptive Incident Management Teams (IMTs), adequately provide for coordinated cross tenure interagency bushfire preparedness. National Parks and Wildlife Service staff are frequently represented in these pre-emptive IMTs. The National Parks and Wildlife Service will amend its fire management manual to reinforce the concept of pre-emptive IMT formation. NSW RFS State Operations, in consultation with other fire authorities, has directed the formation of inter-agency IMT when conditions warrant.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19</p> <p>That as part of the adoption of such a posture in 'severe' or worse fire conditions, the National Parks and Wildlife Service consider alerting, at an early stage, all relevant persons and organisations, such as shire councils, heavy plant operators, the local RFS captains, Fire & Rescue NSW and other emergency services, that it is doing so, and that their assistance may be required at short notice.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The principle of ensuring that organisations and suppliers are made aware of potential requests for assistance in fire fighting operations is agreed. As the lead combat agency, the NSW Rural Fire Service monitors conditions and makes contact with supporting organisations and suppliers at local and state levels. This co-ordinated approach is considered to be more effective than requiring each individual land manager to contact the same pool of support agencies in such conditions.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20</p> <p>That the National Park and Wildlife Service review its fire weather training regime and consider adopting or adapting the fire weather training courses introduced in Victoria following the 2009 bushfire disaster.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) has formed the Fire Weather Training Review sub-committee to develop a national Fire Weather training program. The NSW Rural Service, through the AFAC Fire Weather Training Group, is contributing to the development of national standards for training. When finalised, these will be incorporated into the suite of training packages for all agencies, including the National Parks and Wildlife</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 21</p> <p>That National Parks and Wildlife Service conduct a review of its hazard reduction policies to ensure all assets within and on the boundary of the Park are clearly identified and an adequate policy or management plan exists for the protection of all assets, including a procedure pursuant to which progress in meeting hazard reduction targets is regularly and comprehensively assessed. We note that the Parliamentary Inquiry included a recommendation as to funding to be made available for prescribed burning.</p>	<p>Service.</p> <p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>Existing National Parks and Wildlife Service hazard reduction policies provide for the identification of assets within and on a boundary of the park. These policies include the requirement to prepare a reserve fire management strategy (RFMS).</p> <p>Following the Wambelong fire the National Parks and Wildlife Service commenced a major review of the Warrumbungle National Park RFMS. This review will examine the location of Asset Protection and Strategic Fire Advantage zones and will incorporate the latest research on fuel development and fire risk within Warrumbungle National Park.</p> <p>In July 2011, the National Parks and Wildlife Service implemented a state wide annual average hazard reduction target of 135,000 hectares over a rolling five year period. Each region is allocated a portion of this overall target to achieve. Progress toward achieving National Parks and Wildlife Service hazard reduction targets is monitored weekly during the hazard reduction burning season. At the completion of every hazard reduction burn the National Parks and Wildlife Service provides performance data to the NSW Rural Fire Service as part of its state wide reporting requirements.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 22</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service conduct a review of its prescribed burns program to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that all necessary managerial approvals for a prescribed burn are provided as promptly as possible</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service has commenced a project to update its systems for managing fires and incidents on National Parks and Wildlife Service managed lands. A new software system, 'Elements' will collate and simplify the assessment, planning and approval processes for hazard reduction programs and includes automated reminders and prompts to ensure tasks are actioned by set deadlines. The system will be integrated with NSW Rural Fire Service systems and is presently being rolled out across the State.</p>
<p>Recommendation 23</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service consider developing a land management policy that requires hazard reduction around identified assets within the Park and the clearing of fire trails within the Park before the bush fire season commences. Consideration should also be given to developing additional fire trails in the Park, bearing in mind the lack of available fire trails to the south of the John Renshaw Parkway in the park.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>Existing National Parks and Wildlife Service policies and procedures, such as its fire management manual and reserve fire management strategies, adequately provide for pre-bush fire season hazard reduction around identified assets. The Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee Policy on fire trails has also been incorporated into the National Parks and Wildlife Service Fire Management Manual in its entirety.</p> <p>The Castlereagh Bushfire Management Committee has completed its review of the existing fire trail network, and proposed to construct a new fire trail network around the Mt Cenn Cruaich facility. This includes a new section of trail within the national park. The Bush Fire Management Committee will continue to monitor the existing fire trail network and consider upgrades to existing fire trails or the need for new trails in consultation with key stakeholders. This occurs on an ongoing basis as part of its bush fire risk and operational management programs.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>That the NSW Government commit to and fund a long term program of prescribed burning based on the recommendation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission of an annual rolling target of a minimum of five per cent of public land per year, and that the NSW Government commit to extending the funding for the National Parks and Wildlife Service five year hazard reduction program past 2016</p>	<p>Response: Support in Part</p> <p>The NSW Government supports the principle of increases to the level of hazard reduction works to protect life and property from bush fire using the current risk based approach.</p> <p>The NSW Government will fund 10 regionally based NSW Rural Fire Service mitigation crews to increase the level of completed hazard reduction burning works, particularly to capitalise on mid-week burning opportunities when volunteer availability is low.</p> <p>The NSW Government does not support the adoption of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission of an annual rolling target of a minimum of 5 per cent of public land per year. Prescribing a hectare only target of 5% of a particular tenure, does not take into consideration the location, nature or level of the risk, or the outcomes expected in terms of protecting life, property and the environment. In February 2015, the Victorian Government announced that it planned to replace the 5% annual hazard reduction target adopted after the 2009 Royal Commission with a more strategic, risk based system.</p> <p>The current hazard reduction framework in NSW is a strategic, risk based system. Within this framework the NSW Government has committed to targeting the protection of almost 600,000 homes over the next four years through hazard reduction works, and almost 750,000 hectares of hazard reduction activities.</p> <p>Whilst there has been an increase in the five year average of completed hazard reduction works from 128,894 hectares in 2010/11 providing protection for 128,593 properties to 169,343 hectares in 2014/15 providing protection for</p>

Recommendation	Response
	<p>144,232 properties, proposed works for 2014/15 covering nearly 41,000 properties remain to be completed. This is particularly important in taking advantage of mid-week burning opportunities.</p> <p>Using enhanced financial resources provided by the NSW Government, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has achieved significant increases in its hazard reduction program since 2011. In recognition of this, the 2011-16 Enhanced Bushfire Management Program (EBMP) has been extended to June 2017. Any potential extension of the NPWS EBMP beyond 2017 will be considered by the NSW Government following formal review of the program and its funding.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service establish a regime of frequent mosaic burning within the Warrumbungle National Park, where conditions permit, to be monitored and evaluated via a formal fully funded research program. This program should then inform the Service's approach to the wider national park estate</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>Reserve Fire Management Strategies (RFMS) are the basis for preparing National Parks and Wildlife Service prescribed burning plans of operations and regional hazard reduction plans. In implementing its hazard reduction programme, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has in the past, and will into the future, achieve fuel reduction that has a mosaic distribution throughout Warrumbungle National Park.</p> <p>The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage has established a three year \$1.3M research and restoration programme to guide recovery and future management of the natural and cultural assets of the Warrumbungle National Park. The research programme is due to be finalised in 2016 and the information will be used to guide development of the new Warrumbungle National Park Fire Management Strategy.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service, in collaboration with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, review and improve the system of bush fire management zones to ensure that greater priority is given to hazard reduction on land classified within land management zones</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>While the NSW Government support's the principle of the recommendation, this needs to be considered within the context of the existing risk based approach. The Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee's bush fire risk management planning process utilises a standard bush fire management zoning system. The NSW Rural Fire Service is currently developing new tools to support bush fire risk assessment, using emerging technology and best practice approaches to data modelling, to further strengthen the management of bush fire risk.</p> <p>Appropriate fuel management planning for the Land Management Zone is assisted by the use of fire frequency threshold analysis to identify areas that are a priority for burning.</p> <p>The Independent Hazard Reduction Audit Panel noted and endorsed the NSW bush fire management system, based on a multi-agency, tenure blind approach using locally focussed Bush Fire Management Committees, Bush Fire Risk Management Plans and the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code streamlined environmental assessment and approval process, as best practice.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> streamline the regulatory system for hazard reduction burns, including the permit system, in order to identify and remove any unnecessary impediments to timely, planned hazard reduction burning improve accountability in relation to the implementation of bush fire risk management plans as a means of delivering more hazard reduction 	<p>Response: Completed</p> <p>The Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee already requires Bush Fire Management Committees to prepare Bush Fire Risk Management Plans to assist in the identification and prioritisation of hazard reduction works, and to monitor the progress towards completion of identified treatments. The Rural Fires Act 1997 also enables the Commissioner of the NSW RFS to exercise the functions of the Bush Fire Management Committee if it has failed to submit a draft Bush Fire Risk Management Plan or has submitted an inadequate plan. The Independent Hazard Reduction Audit Panel noted and endorsed the NSW bush fire management system as best practice. The NSW RFS will undertake a review of the Fire Permit policy and procedures in 2016 as part of its scheduled policy review programme.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service develop and implement a comprehensive community education campaign aimed at increasing community understanding of and support for hazard reduction burns</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>This NSW Rural Fire Service follows the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) approach to increasing understanding and support for bush fire hazard reduction works. COAG's endorsed National Bushfire Management Policy Statement for Forests and Rangelands, aims to improve the engagement of communities in fire prone areas in bush fire mitigation and management. Increasing public awareness of risk in their communities is a key feature of the NSW Rural Fire Service Community Protection Plan Programme. Community engagement will also be a key consideration of several initiatives the NSW RFS is currently undertaking, such as the Guardian project (which will increase visibility</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service investigate mechanisms to enhance the predictability of megafires and how this information is communicated easily to the public</p>	<p>of planned hazard reduction works to the public) and developing the next phase of the bush fire risk management planning process.</p> <p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Government supports technologies which enhance the predictability of large scale bush fire events and the ability to effectively communicate bush fire information to the public. The NSW Rural Fire Service currently uses the PHOENIX Rapidfire predictive model as a fire behaviour predictive tool. This technology, as it develops, will enable more robust predictability of large bush fires and improved capacity to inform the community through mediums such as the 'Fires near me' app and other public information facilities. Through the Australasian Fire Authorities Council, a national Bush Fire Predictive Service program is being developed to improve the prediction of fires including large and fast moving fires.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service review the decision not to construct additional fire trails in the Warrumbungle National Park following the Wambelong fire</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>In February 2015, the NSW Government announced its commitment to giving the NSW Rural Fire Service the powers it needs to ensure that a strategic fire trail network across all tenures could be maintained in a way that provides for the safe and effective suppression of fires, and enable essential hazard reduction work to be carried out. The NSW Government is pursuing legislative amendments to facilitate the development of a strategic network of fire trails in NSW.</p> <p>The Castlereagh Bush Fire Management Committee has completed its review of the existing fire trail network, and has agreed an upgrade to the fire trail around the Mt Cenn Cruaich facility is required. The Committee will continue to monitor</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, at the direction of the NSW Rural Fire Service, enhance the network of fire trails within national parks across New South Wales by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reopening those fire trails that have been closed within the last ten years • establishing new fire trails where appropriate • providing sufficient fire vehicle turning areas • ensuring adequate fire trail maintenance over the long term. 	<p>the existing fire trail network and consider upgrades to existing fire trails or the need for new trails in consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service.</p> <p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The NSW Government recognises the importance of a robust network of fire trails in national parks and reserves and other land tenures across the State. This includes the provision of new fire trails where necessary, provision of vehicle turning areas, and ensuring adequate fire trail maintenance in accordance with fire trail classification. These measures support the safe and effective suppression of fires, and ensure essential hazard reduction works can be carried out.</p> <p>In March 2015 the NSW Government committed to giving the NSW Rural Fire Service the powers it needed to establish a functional fire trail network to better facilitate hazard reduction activities and assist in fighting fires by allowing more timely access to bush fires on all land tenures. Work on how a robust fire trails network may be implemented is currently underway.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9</p> <p>That the NSW Government improve the protection of media and telecommunications towers around New South Wales by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the asset protection zone around the towers on Mt Cenn Crauch and other comparable sites to a radius of at least 100 metres • conducting an audit of all New South Wales media and telecommunications sites to examine their fire safety in 	<p>Response: Not supported</p> <p>A ‘one size fits all’ approach to Asset Protection Zones (APZs) is not supported. Media and telecommunications towers are classed as critical infrastructure and are recorded in Bush Fire Risk Management Plans as infrastructure assets. APZ for these towers are determined once certain variables such as the towers’ location and topography are taken into account. Including media and telecommunications sites within Bushfire Risk Management Plans provides a mechanism for assessing their vulnerability to fire, and the measures that could</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>respect of land clearance, fire trails and fuel loads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementing a strategy to ensure that licensees of these sites fulfil all their hazard reduction obligations. 	<p>be introduced to provide optimum protection.</p> <p>The NSW RFS will continue to reinforce with Bush Fire Management Committees the need to identify and develop treatments to protect these assets within Bush Fire Risk Management Plan. The Castlereagh Bush Fire Management Committee assessed the required APZ at Mt Cenn Cruiach telecommunications tower as 40 metres. The works to create the APZ were carried out in December 2014.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service examine its staffing policy for periods of extreme and catastrophic weather conditions to ensure that sufficient staff are available on site on fire watch.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The staffing policy will be examined as part of the National Parks and Wildlife Service’s annual review of its fire management manual.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service consider the feasibility, on a case by case basis, of closing public roads through national parks on days with catastrophic fire danger rating, to mitigate the risk of bush fire ignition in national parks.</p>	<p>Response: Support in Part</p> <p>While the closure of certain public roads through national parks during periods of catastrophic fire danger rating is sound, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has no jurisdiction over public roads. The proposal to close public roads through national parks on days with catastrophic fire danger rating is a matter for the relevant road management authority or the NSW Police Force.</p> <p>Implementation of this recommendation is complex and requires the involvement of both State and Local Government entities. The issue has been referred to the Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee for consideration.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 12</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service investigate the cost and feasibility of installing infrared cameras at the Siding Springs Observatory and key sites in other national parks to facilitate fire spotting.</p>	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>In 2014, the Universities that own the Siding Springs Observatory gifted an optical camera to Warrumbungle Council for fire detection purposes. The camera currently operates from the Castlereagh Fire Control Centre at Coonabarabran and is being expanded to be accessible at NSW Rural Fire Service State Operations.</p> <p>Trials conducted by the NSW Rural Fire Service, CSIRO and Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre has found that while the cameras can observe and locate fires over a 24 hour period, the technology may benefit from further enhancements to speed and reliability of detection.</p> <p>However, the NSW Rural Fire Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre will continue to monitor and evaluate this technology.</p>
<p>Recommendation 13</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> alter the standard procedures for Remote Aerial Response Teams to enable them to operate at night in conjunction with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, enhance the capability of both Remote Aerial 	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>Improvements to NSW Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service Remote Aerial Response Team (RART) and Remote Aerial Firefighting Team (RAFT) capabilities are supported, subject to safety considerations which are paramount to fire fighter safety</p> <p>RART and RAFT operational protocols, which are common across both NSW Rural Fire Service and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, will be reviewed to</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Response Teams and Remote Area Firefighting Teams to fight fires at any time including at night.</p>	<p>identify circumstances and conditions under which these teams may operate at night, providing that crew safety is paramount.</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has equipped two of its helicopters for night operations, and has commenced conservatively trialling and developing safe working procedures. NSW Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service Remote Aerial Firefighting crew can already remain in the field overnight in order to maximise work achieved and to monitor the situation overnight if conditions allow.</p> <p>The NSW RFS is establishing four regional training centres specifically for RART/RAFT operations to support the training and competency maintenance of RART/RAFT team members.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commission an independent investigation into the allegations that brigade group captains and captains were not duly, or in a timely way, notified of the outbreak of the Wambelong fire • improve procedures for the notification of group captains to ensure that they are notified of any fire outbreak in and/or adjoining their brigade areas 	<p>Response: Not supported</p> <p>The Castlereagh Zone has established Group Captain and Brigade Captain paging groups which enable all Group and Brigade Captains to receive messages for all incidents in their area, as well as other operational information following feedback received through After Action Reviews and debriefs after the Wambelong fire to identify areas of improvement. A further investigation is therefore not necessary.</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service will update its operational procedures to establish a protocol for notification to Group Captains and Brigade Officers of fire incidents in adjoining areas of responsibility.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 15</p> <p>That the NSW Government, as a matter of urgency, amend the Rural Fires Act 1997 to codify the current interim arrangements for command and notification requirements for class 1 and class 2 fires, which clarify that the NSW Rural Fire Service or Fire and Rescue NSW:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have ultimate responsibility for all bush fires regardless of tenure • are responsible for the appointment of incident controllers • are responsible for keeping the public informed 	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee Policy, Management of Bush Fire Operations now includes updated command and notification requirements. These updated requirements have been accepted and adopted by agencies and successfully implemented over the last fire season. On that basis, amendments to the Rural Fires Act 1997 are not required at this time.</p> <p>Keeping the public informed is a requirement of the Rural Fires Act 1997. The NSW RFS also has a number of public information platforms such as Emergency Alert, its website, social media, 'Fires Near Me' and 1300 call centre as well as strong relationships with mainstream media to keep the public informed. Face to face engagement activities including community meetings are also held.</p>
<p>Recommendation 16</p> <p>That the NSW Government consider enabling the default position during catastrophic and extreme fire danger periods to be the same as for section 44 fires, so that fire control centres have the same systems and resources ready to deploy should a fire break out.</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service already has an established procedure for escalating levels of readiness by its staff and volunteers, as well as its partner agencies. The protocol is based on predicted weather inputs as well as the prevailing fire danger and current incidents. It is normal practice for 'pre-emptive' section 44 declarations to be made where conditions are predicted to be catastrophic or when other factors raise the risk to a level requiring heightened preparedness.</p>

	Response
<p>Recommendation 17</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service review its procedures, systems and infrastructure for notifying community members of bush fires, both when a fire has broken out and as it proceeds, to ensure the provision of timely and adequate information</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service reviewed its procedures, systems and infrastructure following the 2013 bush fires. While warning arrangements for bush fires in NSW are sound, the NSW Rural Fire Service will continue training and resourcing for local level public liaison activities, including training for fire managers through its Incident Control Major Incident multi-agency course, to ensure the provision of timely information to the community</p>
<p>Recommendation 18</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service, in order to ensure greater respect for volunteer fire fighters’ knowledge and experience in the management of fires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine its plans of operations to provide for the use of local knowledge at every level of decision making down the chain of command • require a local fire fighter to be stationed in every command vehicle, where possible • ensure that every out of area crew includes at least one local fire fighter • require officers to engage more effectively and regularly with volunteers during the periods between fires • consider any further strategies to address the entrenched conflict between officers and volunteers, including additional ways to empower volunteers and utilise them 	<p>Response: Not supported</p> <p>Bush fire incidents in NSW are managed in accordance with the span of control and delegation principles outlined in Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS). The framework is supported by various Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee policies, including co-ordinated fire fighting arrangements which explicitly require local fire fighters to be included in the ‘chain of command’.</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service also has an internal operational doctrine which reflects AIIMS framework and reporting structures. All NSW Rural Fire Service members (volunteers and salaried) are trained in and are expected to adhere to, command and control protocols. This includes all volunteers working with properly identified, qualified and briefed Divisional Commanders and Sector Leaders to achieve necessary outcomes.</p> <p>Since the Wambelong fire the importance of working within command and control protocols has been reiterated at training sessions held in the Castlereagh Zone and the surrounding region for both existing and new members. The NSW</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>more effectively.</p>	<p>RFS approach is to provide communications between fire units, an effective command and control arrangement and regular exercising between adjoining groups, supported by a doctrinal base which reinforces the need for local knowledge and input into fire fighting.</p> <p>While every effort is made to embed local firefighters into the bush fire management framework, this is not always possible. For example, during large scale events, it is often necessary to draw fire fighting resources from intrastate (from both NSW RFS and other fire authorities) and interstate capabilities. However, the NSW Rural Fire Service will continue to reinforce the critical role of local knowledge in fire fighting and the need to have this input at all strategic and tactical levels.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service formally recognise the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association as a legitimate advocacy organisation representing volunteer bush fire fighters, and duly consult with it on policy and operational matters.</p>	<p>Response: Not supported</p> <p>The NSW Rural Fire Service has an extensive suite of consultative committees, forums and facilities to enable it to receive input from volunteers and staff at local, regional and state levels. Volunteers are also represented on the Corporate Executive Group and the Rural Fire Service Advisory Council, as well as volunteer and staff consultative committees. Draft Service Standards and draft operational protocols are also posted to the MyRFS website for all volunteers to provide input.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20</p> <p>That the Minister for Police and Emergency Services examine the feasibility of relocating the NSW Rural Fire Service headquarters to a rural or regional location</p>	<p>Response: Not supported</p> <p>Facilities, utilities, communications and technological infrastructure, together with close proximity to major transport networks, make the current NSW Rural Fire Service Headquarters ideal. The same high standard of infrastructure,</p>

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	<p>security and technology would be difficult to maintain in a regional setting.</p> <p>During major bush fire emergencies the NSW State Operations Centre at Lidcombe functions as a hub where fire services, land management and support agencies lead the coordinated bush fire-fighting effort under the direction of the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service.</p> <p>Public information broadcast through the media is key to NSW Rural Fire Service public messaging and the safety of communities under the threat of bush fire. Being in close proximity to the large media agencies in Sydney is critical.</p> <p>Over 70 percent of NSW Rural Fire Service staff is based outside of Headquarters in many regional locations across the State. NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers are serviced locally by 47 district offices, making the NSW Rural Fire Service one of the most decentralised agencies in Government.</p>
<p>Recommendation 21</p> <p>That the NSW Rural Fire Service reassesses the protection of pastoral assets during bush fires to ensure that priority for protection is not simply afforded to the homestead, and that land holders are, within reason, able to request which of their own assets are protected.</p>	<p>Response: Support in Part</p> <p>While the need to protect assets was highlighted by the Hazard Reduction Audit Panel Report, which led to the Rural Fires Act 1997 being amended to include under Section 3 and Section 9 specific reference to ‘...the protection of infrastructure and environmental, economic, cultural, agricultural and community assets from destruction or damage arising from fires – the first priority in all operations is the preservation of life and property.’ The Incident Controller has the authority to develop an Incident Action Plan which articulates the strategies and tactics to be utilised for a particular incident taking into consideration all appropriate assets. Fire fighters on the field follow the strategies outlined in the</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 22</p> <p>That the Minister for Police and Emergency Services review the communications technologies used by the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry NSW during fire fighting operations, to ensure that systems are standardised and effective. Within this context, the potential value of satellite phone technology should be investigated</p>	<p>Incident Action Plan and command and control protocols.</p> <p>The importance of communicating with landholders during these events will continue to be emphasised.</p> <p>Response: Support in Part</p> <p>Effective communication is an essential component in the prevention and minimisation of the impact of bush fires, other hazards and emergency incidents on NSW communities.</p> <p>In 2011 the NSW Rural Fire Service commenced a programme to upgrade its radio network. An agreement on technology choice, based on inter-operability with other NSW emergency services was determined in collaboration with the NSW Telco Authority. The new radio system, which is being progressively implemented through NPWS, has channels compatible with the NSW Rural Fire Service 'fire ground' radio system.</p> <p>NSW Rural Fire Service tanker fire ground radios have National Parks and Wildlife Service channels programmed and the National Parks and Wildlife Service radios have NSW Rural fire Service 'fire ground' channels programmed, allowing for communication on each other's networks. Other supporting agencies including Fire and Rescue NSW and the Forestry Corporation use liaison channels to facilitate multi-agency fire fighting.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 23</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service adopt an interim fencing agreement in the immediate aftermath of a fire. This will enable emergency and interim works to commence, but features such as length, fencing components and site of the fence line are not binding. A final fencing agreement would be negotiated no earlier than six months following a major national park fire</p>	<p>Response: Support in Part</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service revised its boundary fencing policy following the Wambelong fire. The revised policy, published in February 2014, provides that when a fence is damaged by fire the National Parks and Wildlife Service will respond to requests for assistance to repair or replace the fence through a simple, streamlined process.</p> <p>Provided the replacement fence is to be located in the same location as the original fence, replacement fencing proposals can be dealt with promptly. Given the monetary value of fencing materials used for boundary fence construction, and the amount of work required by a landowner to erect a fence, it is reasonable that the parties formalise their agreement for the works at the time, rather than wait at least six months to do so.</p>
<p>Recommendation 24</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that where a park is adjacent to a rural land holding, its side of the boundary fence is cleared to the same legislative requirement as the land holding, that is, 	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service Boundary Fencing Policy provides for a fence-line clearing distance of up to six metres. The policy also acknowledges that suitable clearing distances are dependent on a number of factors, such as topography and access, and provides for flexibility in this regard.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>six metres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> examine the fairness of the policy whereby, in the event of a fire originating on national park land, the Service provides the fencing materials to construct or replace boundary fences, while the neighbour erects the fences. 	<p>The historical practice of achieving a joint contribution by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and a neighbouring landowner to fence construction has been applied across NSW over many decades. In the context of the length of time the practice has existed and the number of individual cases to which the practice has applied, few concerns have been raised in relation to fairness.</p>
<p>Recommendation 25</p> <p>That the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service remove from its boundary fencing policy and standard contract the condition that requires adjoining land owners to maintain a fence that has been damaged by trees falling from national park land.</p>	<p>Response: Not supported</p> <p>The National Parks and Wildlife Service Boundary Fencing Policy provides flexibility for National Parks and Wildlife Service assistance with fence maintenance in exceptional circumstances. The policy also provides for the removal of dead, dangerous or overhanging trees from national park land in the vicinity of a fence which, in combination with an appropriate fence line clearing, minimises the risk of trees falling on boundary fences.</p>
<p>Recommendation 26</p> <p>That the Office of State Revenue investigate mechanisms to enhance the affordability of insurance for properties and assets in fire affected areas</p>	<p>Response: Support</p> <p>The NSW Government has investigated mechanisms in which insurance for properties and assets in fire affected areas could be made more affordable. From 1 July 2017 the NSW Government will abolish the Emergency Services Levy on insurance policies and replace it with an Emergency Services Property Levy (ESPL), which will be paid alongside council rates. The changes will ensure a more equitable distribution of the funding of emergency services across all landowners. Modelling suggests annual insurance premiums for residential property will fall by around \$200. It is anticipated that the vast majority of insured residential property owners will be better off under the ESPL with the average property</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 27</p> <p>That the NSW Government take all reasonable steps to expedite the process of establishing any legal liability for the losses incurred by property owners as a result of the Wambelong fire, and in the event that it is found liable, expedite the process of paying compensation claims</p>	<p>owner saving around \$40 each year.</p> <p>Discounts will apply to pensioners and concession card holders. Professor Allan Fels AO will be appointed as Emergency Services Levy Insurance Monitor and Professor David Cousins AM will be appointed as Deputy Monitor to ensure that insurers pass on the cost savings to consumers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 28</p> <p>That the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services and NSW Treasury:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reimburse the Warrumbungle Shire Council for the NSW Government's share of the remaining shortfall of \$528,000 in funds pledged to the recovery process ● consider how the process for claiming funds pledged by 	<p>Response: Support in part</p> <p>Three claims for compensation have been lodged with the NSW Self Insurance Corporation - one by the Coonabarabran Property Owners Alliance and two by individual property owners for damage to property and losses as a result of suppression and mitigation activities for the Wambelong fire. The claims were referred to GIO as claims manager for the NSW Self Insurance Corporation, who have declined the claims and informed the affected parties after carefully considering all the facts and circumstances of the matter.</p>
<p>Recommendation 28</p> <p>That the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services and NSW Treasury:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reimburse the Warrumbungle Shire Council for the NSW Government's share of the remaining shortfall of \$528,000 in funds pledged to the recovery process ● consider how the process for claiming funds pledged by 	<p>Response: Noted; subject to further discussion</p> <p>The NSW Government is advised that two claims arising from the Wambelong fire were submitted by the Warrumbungle Shire Council. The first claim formed part of a total claim of \$557,600 for the clean up of asbestos following the fire. NSW Public Works and Services has advised that all but \$12,101.60 of Council's claim of \$557,600 was paid. The unpaid amount related to ineligible contracts.</p> <p>The second claim related to an amount of \$161,037.50 for the removal of fallen trees for fire damaged roads. It is understood that this claim was never finalised</p>

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<p>state government representatives in future disasters and emergencies can be streamlined.</p>	<p>by Council. The deadline for finalising this claim has since expired (30 June 2015). No other claims have been able to be identified.</p> <p>The Office of Emergency Management will continue to have discussions with Council to address any outstanding issues in relation to claims.</p>
<p>Recommendation 29</p> <p>That the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services urgently review its policies for the provision of disaster welfare services to ensure that in the event of a bush fire emergency and the declaration of a fire under section 44 of the Rural Fires Act 1997, adequate funding and services, especially recovery centres and mental health services, are provided for an adequate length of time, with gradual transition to normal service delivery when those services are no longer required.</p>	<p>Response: Complete</p> <p>Following the Wambelong fire, the then Ministry for Police and Emergency Services, in partnership with other agencies established a “Support Service” known as the Warrumbungle Bushfire Support Co-ordination Service to assist bush fire affected households with their recovery. This was jointly funded by the NSW State Government and the Commonwealth Government under Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.</p> <p>The Bushfire Support Co-ordination Service operated from 18 February to 9 August 2013 and supported 82 discrete households with a range of services including crisis support and short term counselling, referrals to health and other community services, linkages to recovery funding sources including the Mayor’s Appeal and other grants, and assistance in decision-making and applications for various subsidies. The Co-ordinator of the Support Service was a former mental health senior practitioner.</p> <p>The Coonabarabran Recovery Centre opened on 18 January 2013 and operated at the Coonabarabran Council Community Hall until 8 March 2013. The Recovery Centre received a total of 1,324 intakes. On 8 March 2013 the recovery centre transitioned to the Warrumbungle Shire Council offices providing a modified</p>

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	<p>service through council intake staff. An exit plan for the transition was agreed to at the May 2013 Recovery Committee meeting, which outlined a staged approach for the transition.</p> <p>The Bushfire Support Co-ordination Service also moved to the council offices and also continued to provide assessment, counselling and referral services from this location.</p> <p>Lessons from this and other models developed following disaster events have now been incorporated into the development of a “Disaster Assistance Guideline” relevant to establishing interventions like a ‘support service’.</p>