

ASSETS, PREMISES AND FUNDING OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

Organisation: Forestry Corporation of NSW

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Public Accounts Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Committee Chair

Re: Inquiry into assets, premises and funding of the NSW Rural Fire Service

As the appointed land manager for approximately two million hectares of public forest, and one of the four statutory firefighting authorities in NSW, Forestry Corporation of NSW recognises and supports the well established and highly effective coordinated fire fighting and management approach led by the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Coordinated fire fighting in NSW, with RFS as the lead agency, is the best-in-class model in the country. Forestry Corporation recognises and supports this well established and highly effective coordinated fire fighting and management approach and would be concerned about any change that could reduce the effectiveness of this model.

Forestry Corporation notes the terms of reference of the inquiry have a very specific focus and has provided comments on some specific matters below. However, many of the matters raised in the terms of reference are only comprise a small component of a broader system that is key to coordinated fire fighting. These matters should not be considered in isolation from the broader coordinated firefighting approach.

Emergency response

Fire fighting and fire management in NSW is managed collaboratively across the landscape, within a well-established framework led by the RFS that provides both statewide coordination and localised fire management and response.

Many detailed inquiries have been conducted into fire management and emergency response in NSW and recommendations continue to be implemented collaboratively to enhance the systems and processes that underpin NSW's emergency fire response. Local Government has a key role in coordinated firefighting and any consideration of changes must take into account the context of the broader collaborative fire management system in NSW and the previous inquiries that have considered the effectiveness of this framework. Any changes that reduce the ability of local councils to support fire authorities in emergency response situations may be detrimental to the overall fire response in NSW.

RFS assets and premises

Access to fit-for-purpose assets and facilities underpins effective collaboration and coordinated emergency response.

Forestry Corporation works with the RFS and other agencies in the field daily and considers the RFS firefighting fleet essential to protecting rural communities. As a firefighting authority, Forestry Corporation maintains its own fleet, equipment and resources that are deployed to fire management. However, in an emergency response situation, coordinated deployment of all available firefighting assets, equipment and resources provides for a streamlined and effective coordinated response to the threat of fire with the shared objective to protect life and property.

Similarly, fit-for-purpose facilities are essential for effective inter-agency collaboration on effective fire detection and emergency response. Ensuring fit for purpose facilities are available is critical to enabling the All Hazards, All Agencies approach in NSW as per the State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN).

Facilities where multiple agencies can meet regularly are required to underpin effective inter-agency collaboration on both proactive fire management strategies, and effective fire detection and emergency response. Having suitable premises for managing fire detection and response is critical, particularly in areas of high risk for the forestry industry.

Forestry Corporation maintains its own premises, which include dedicated fire rooms and a network of fire towers, but relies upon RFS Fire Control Centres and other premises to manage fires collaboratively under the coordinated firefighting arrangements, especially when incidents escalate. Maintaining these facilities to the highest standard is critical to effective bush fire management across tenures.

Bush Fire Management Committees

Bush Fire Management Committees are key to coordinated fire fighting and Forestry Corporation takes its role as a member of these committees incredibly seriously. These forums provide for the development of important fire management strategies like Bush Fire Risk Management Plans, Fire Access and Fire Trail Plans and Plans of Operations.

Delivery of these plans is critical to ensure that agencies such as Forestry Corporation fulfill their obligations as fire fighting authorities under the Rural Fires Act 1997. Local governments are important members of these committees, which are mechanisms through which local communities and local governments can provide input into fire management strategies in their regions or that will impact them.

Any changes that risk weakening or altering the coordinated fire management model, restricting access to suitable fleet, equipment or premises, or reducing the ability of local government to support fire authorities would be detrimental and should not be supported.

Should the committee have any questions for Forestry Corporation, we would be happy to assist. Please contact Forestry Corporation's Senior Manager Fire & Natural Hazards Rebel Talbert on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Ross Dickson
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