

ASSETS, PREMISES AND FUNDING OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

Name: Mr Peter Burfitt
Date Received: 10 May 2024

The Committee Manager
Parliamentary Accounts Committee
Parliament House
Sydney 2000

Assets, premises and funding of the NSW Rural Fire Service

This is my submission for consideration by the aforementioned committee of the NSW Parliament.

1. Section 119 of the Rural Fires Act, 1997 is no longer fit for purpose. The RFS selects, purchases and fits out all of its appliances and determines where appliances are based. The RFS also determines the maintenance regimes that are applied to the appliances. In effect Councils no longer has control over RFS appliances. Hence the provisions of the Act are contrary of Australian accounting standards.
2. RFS stations, despite being on council managed land (there are exceptions where stations are on say NPWS lands) are being built to standards set by the RFS and in most cases the construction is managed by the RFS and the funds are provided under the RFS budget. Again Councils have little control over the design and or use of these assets.
3. RFS equipment: Equipment in RFS stations is provided by the RFS from its budget, purchased by the brigade from donations and/or grants received. Although this equipment becomes vested in Councils and maintained by councils the RFS is in full control of these locally purchased assets.
4. Since 1997 there has been a significant growth in the RFS in both staffing and finances. Similarly there has been a growth in the involvement of RFS brigades in local emergency management. The RFS is now the "other" fire service in NSW in the provision of emergency response across most of rural NSW . Both organisations provide fire management services to local communities, have standards of practice and equipment and are professionally trained for the tasks they undertake. Like the NSW Fire and Rescue the RFS is operationally independent of local councils.
5. The relation between Councils and the Service must be on a similar basis to that of the NSW Fire and Rescue. As the stations are built to RFS standards the RFS has to accept responsibility for their care, control and management. The equipment and appliances are controlled by the RFS thus the councils should have the option, perhaps by way of first right of refusal and or open tender, to provide maintenance service for these assets.

The RFS is now more than ever a professional fire fighting agency operating across the state. Its independence of councils in operational decision making is clearly evident to me. The section of the act, Section 119, is largely an anachronism and need to be removed.

Peter Burfitt



I am a member of the Rural Fire Service. These views are mine and are not to be taken as those of the RFS nor of my local council.