



MEDIA RELEASE

Upper House committee publishes report on the Wambelong fire

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Upper House committee examining the causes and management of the Wambelong bushfire that started in the Warrumbungle National Park near Coonabarabran released its report today.

The Chair of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5, the Hon Robert Brown MLC stated, ‘The Wambelong fire of January 2013 burned out Warrumbungle National Park, destroyed scores of surrounding properties and shattered the lives of many people in the Coonabarabran community. The committee has made 29 recommendations focused on improving legislation, policy and fire operations, in order to ensure better prevention of bushfires, and better responses to them.’

‘Our most important recommendation is the NSW Government urgently affirm the authority of the NSW Rural Fire Service to fight bushfires by enshrining in the *NSW Rural Fires Act 1997* the ‘interim arrangements’ put in place after this fire that clarify who has ultimate control of the initial response when a bushfire breaks out. This control sits squarely on the shoulders of the NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW, which must act to fulfil the responsibilities vested in them,” Mr Brown stated.

The committee also made a number of recommendations to help prevent bushfires by systematically reducing fuel loads of dry wood and vegetative litter on public and private land across the state. Mr Brown said, ‘We recommend that the government commit to and fund a long term program of prescribed burning based on the recommendation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission for an annual rolling target of a minimum of five per cent of public land. It must also commit to extending the funding for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife five year hazard reduction program past 2016.’

‘This inquiry also highlighted to the committee the distress that people affected by a bushfire experience, even long after the fire. We recommend that the government ensure that in future bushfire emergencies, sufficient support services including those for mental health, are provided for an adequate length of time.’

A list of the committee’s recommendations is attached. The report is on the committee’s website – www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc5.

*For further information please contact
the Committee Chair, the Hon Robert Brown MLC, on (02) 9230 3059*