

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE



Volunteer Fire Fighters Association
P.O. Box 148
Peak Hill. NSW 2869

27/10/2014.

Supplementary question: Volunteer Fire Fighters Association

1. You mentioned Blue Mountains Council has been obstructive in bush fire management and asset protection. From your evidence it is falling on local Volunteer Fire Fighters to explain hazard reduction and prescribed burning operations. How can we improve communications and explanations to communities about the necessity to undertake managed burns in the bush?

The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association (VFFA) remain strong advocates for hazard reduction using low intensity prescribed burning, along with other hazard reduction methods.

Hazard reduction offers a multitude of benefits. It offers a safer working environment for fire fighters, superior environmental outcomes, enhanced protection of the community and their assets, enhanced protection of infrastructure and superior financial outcomes.

Currently NSW is hazard reducing less than 1% of bush fire prone lands annually. Leading bush fire experts and previous inquiry findings advise that this percentage needs to be a minimum of 5%. We are drastically behind this 5% and getting further behind every year. If we are ever going to have a chance controlling major fires, we need immediate change.

The lack of hazard reduction is allowing fires to get bigger, more frequent and more devastating. It is crucial that we do something now.
Fires run on fuel, it's that simple.

It is beyond our comprehension how hazard reduction isn't one of the most important priorities for Government and the wider community.

Currently the hazard reduction message is getting high jacked.

- Senior volunteer officers are no longer permitted to talk to the media.
- Government agency media units have been neglecting to inform the public that excessive fuel loads have a direct influence in the severity of the fire/s.
- Anti-burning groups are well organised, well financed and distributing hazard reduction misinformation.

The benefits and importance of hazard reduction is generally not understood.

If we are to get the hazard reduction message out to the wider community, all government agencies need to take pivotal role and the government should direct them to do this.

The RFS and the NPWS have immense budgets, with very little of this being spent on preventative hazard reduction. Research shows that preventative measures are 60 to 100 times more cost effective than reactive measures.

The government could;

- Direct their agencies to set a minimum target of 5% of all bush fire prone lands to be hazard reduced annually.
- Introduce incentives so this 5% target is met.
- Mandate that a certain percentage of their budget be allocated to hazard reduction education.
- Local government officers in charge of environmental issues undertake a mandatory hazard reduction education program that is run by experienced fire fighters.
- Have a dedicated Minister for Emergency Services. Combining Emergency Service with the Police portfolio has not worked. The Minister is unable to dedicate sufficient time to the Emergency Services issues.
- Re-empower brigades to implement local hazard reduction programs.

The hazard reduction education program needs to be run by experienced fire fighters with practical fire ground experience.

The message has to be simple and incorporate all the benefits of hazard reduction;

- a safer working environment for fire fighters,
- superior environmental outcomes,
- enhanced protection of the community and their assets,
- enhanced protection of infrastructure and
- superior financial outcomes.

Hazard reduction education could take the form of;

- Video on RFS, NPWS, Local Government and State Government websites
- Newspaper
- Television
- Radio
- Brigade presentations to local communities
- Pamphlets
- Brief note/statement on the back of local and government agency envelopes.

The VFFA want to be part of the solution.

We are happy to be involved in future discussions, panels or any other forum to help find a way forward.

Yours Sincerely,
Peter Cannon,
President VFFA.