



➤ **Question 1 (Committee Chair)**

From a capability point of view, were the Rural Fire Service in New South Wales to be made the one authority responsible from the first spark on the ground, would that degrade the current capabilities, make no difference or enhance it?

NSW RFS response

Legislative provisions exist in the *Rural Fires Act 1997* (RF Act) to ensure that owners and occupiers of land, including NPWS and Forestry Corporation prevent and manage fires. The RFS has some oversight over these provisions if responding to a bush fire hazard complaint pursuant to s74A of the RF Act.

As is illustrated in the new protocols (attached to supplementary questions), there are two fire districts in NSW being rural fire districts (managed by NSW RFS) and fire districts (managed by FRNSW). All national parks and state forests lands fall into one of these jurisdictions. The Commissioner of the RFS has complete authority in a rural fire district however, unless there is a s44 declared, has no jurisdiction in a fire district.

The firefighting arrangements in NSW require all fire authorities (RFS, Forestry Corporation, FRNSW and National Parks) to use the ICON system for the recording of all bush and grass fires, enabling the RFS to maintain a statewide situational awareness and an oversight at a local and state level. This enables the RFS to discharge its obligations under section 9(1)(a1) of the RF Act, to warn the community regarding bush fires irrespective of land tenure or jurisdiction. These arrangements however, rely upon the co-operation and partnership of a number of agencies, not just the RFS, thereby ensuring the state is served by appropriately trained and locally based resources to best protect the community.

➤ **Question 2 (Hon Lynda Voltz MLC)**

How many other fires were burning at the same time as the Wambelong fire?

NSW RFS response

- 12 January 2013 there were 259 incidents*.
- 13 January 2013 there were 350 incidents*.
- 14 January 2013 there were 261 incidents*.

**includes Wambelong Fire*

➤ **Question 3 (Hon Greg Donnelly MLC)**

Page 5 of the Government's submission says: "Once a fire is declared a Section 44 bush fire emergency, the NSW RFS Commissioner appoints an Incident Controller to take charge of all operations and usually an interagency incident management team is formed".

Did the transition take place between what we have seen on page four (of the Government's submission) and around 11 a.m. on the Sunday and did it take place in the normal way when a section 44 is declared? [Mr Rogers then offered to check times and individuals and provide the answer on notice].

NSW RFS response

A s44 declaration may be made by the Commissioner based on his/her concerns of what is or may occur, or based on a recommendation from the local Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC).

With regard to this specific Declaration, due to the Wambelong fire and the weather conditions on that day, discussions took place between the RFS state and local levels, and subsequently representatives of the BFMC all of whom supported the need for a Declaration. Following this a recommendation was made to the Commissioner who declared a s44 at 1100hrs appointing an Incident Controller and three deputy incident controllers.

Attached is the relevant Declaration applying to the Wambelong Fire.

➤ **Question 4 (Committee Chair)**

Just a point of clarification, could you perhaps also on notice provide us with the position of the person who undertook that role? – we do not need a name; we just want to know who it was who was appointed after the section 44.

NSW RFS response

The NSW RFS District Manager Tamworth was appointed Section 44 Incident Controller on 13 January 2013.

Attached is the relevant Declaration applying to the Wambelong Fire.

➤ **Question 5 (Hon Rick Colless MLC)**

So in that situation the Coonamble and Tooraweenah crews would have called the RFS headquarters in Coonabarabran, spoken to the fire control officer in Coonabarabran and offered their assistance. Would he have said that the fire was under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service or would he have said that they were not required? Who made that decision?

[Mr Rogers replied.... "I imagine it would be our local office – whether it was the fire control officer or someone else in the office I do not notice. I would be quite confident in saying that they would have checked with what was asked for by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. They may have even gone back and confirmed 'Do you need any more' and been told "No, we're fine".]

Could you take that on notice and check the information....it is a very important point about who actually declined the offer of assistance....and the circumstances in which that happened?

NSW RFS response

It is understood that the District RFS Duty Officer had been on the fireground around 1800hrs (12 January 2013) and liaised with National Parks field officers and RFS brigades.

It is further understood from Operational Logs that in communications (radio & telephone) between RFS brigades and National Parks Divisional Commander to both Coonamble and Coonabarabran Fire Controls, that at that time, no additional RFS units were required.

➤ Question 6 – (Hon Rick Colless MLC)

In your understanding, are there other RAFT teams – located maybe with those at Coonamble and Tooraweenah that were declined to attend – that could have in fact been on duty around that fire on the first evening?

[Mr Rogers replied "I have not heard of any being declined to attend. I know in that fire season, and I am more than happy to go back and check where RAFT was committed during that fire season, we had an extreme shortage of RAFT—because a lot of the fires were in more remote areas and we were using RAFT, which is really where they were designed to operate. So there was quite a shortage of RAFT. Only the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the NSW Rural Fire Service have those specialised firefighters. I think the RFS has around 120 or 130 across the State. We are trying to build more capability in that area because we recognise that it is a really important strategy to get to fires early. I am more than happy to look at that and give you information on where all RAFT are and what they were doing at the time. Certainly it was a challenge getting enough RAFT. We used RAFT from the Australian Capital Territory as well because we ran out of RAFT during that fire season. So we do call those people in and we do use them a lot".]

That would be very useful information if you can get that to us.

NSW RFS response

There are no RFS Remote Area Fire Teams (RAFT) in the North West Zone or Castlereagh Zone.

It is important to note, that during the period in question, the NSW RFS had some 140 qualified RAFT members. Many of these specialists were deployed to 21 separate incidents across the state, as outlined below.

Incident Name	Local Government Area	Start Date
Wyanbene Mountain	Palerang	05/01/2013 1800hrs
Brest Fire Trail	Cooma-Monaro	05/01/2013 1930hrs
Camp Oven Spur Fire	Goulburn Mulwaree	05/01/2013 1800hrs
Bees Nest	Goulburn Mulwaree	05/01/2013 1800hrs
Yarrabin	Cooma-Monaro	06/01/2013 1230hrs
Spring Gully	Mid-Western	07/01/2013 1400hrs
Surveyors Creek	Clarence Valley	07/01/2013 1530hrs
Deans Gap	Shoalhaven	07/01/2013 1528hrs
Cungubung Creek	Clarence Valley	07/01/2013 1645hrs
Murrumbilly	Mid-Western	08/01/2013 1130hrs
Badgerys Point Lookout Tallong	Goulburn Mulwaree	09/01/2013 1330hrs
Grose Head North	Hawkesbury	09/01/2013 1559hrs
Colong Swamp	Wollondilly	09/01/2013 0700hrs
Cathedral Rock	Armidale Dumaresq	11/01/2013 2037hrs
Grose Head North	Hawkesbury	12/01/2013 0600hrs
Wambelong (WNP)	Warrumbungle	12/01/2013 1605hrs
Falcon	Mid-Western	12/01/2013 1642hrs
Tinda Creek	Hawkesbury	12/01/2013 1800hrs
Widden Brook	Muswellbrook	12/01/2013 1800hrs
Martindale	Muswellbrook	12/01/2013 1840hrs
Baan Baa	Narrabri	13/01/2013 0645hrs

All communications to be addressed to:

Headquarters
NSW Rural Fire Service
Locked Mail Bag 17
GRANVILLE NSW 2142

Telephone: (02) 8741 5400

e-mail: state.operations@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Headquarters
NSW Rural Fire Service
15 Carter St
LIDCOMBE NSW 2141

Facsimile: (02) 8741 5300

S44D/WarrumbungleGilgandraPart
Coonamble/13012013



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Pursuant to Section 44 of the Rural Fires Act 1997, I, SHANE ALAN FITZSIMMONS, Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, being of the opinion that any bush fire burning in the area described below is likely to assume such proportions as to be incapable of control or suppression by the fire fighting authorities in the area, hereby authorise the person identified below as the Incident Controller to take charge of fire fighting operations for bush fires burning within the area described, assisted by the person or persons also identified below. This authority shall apply for the period indicated.

.....
Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM
Commissioner

Area of declaration: **Warrumbungle and Gilgandra Local Government Areas
and that part of Coonamble Local Government Area that
is within the Warrumbungle National Park
(S44-12/13072)**

	Full Name	Position/Rank	Organisation
Incident Controller	Allyn Clyde Purkiss	Superintendent	NSW RFS
Deputy Incident Controller	Mark Anthony Fosdick	Area Manager	NPWS
Deputy Incident Controller	Garry Andrew Wilson	Superintendent	NSW RFS
Deputy Incident Controller	John Alan Whittall	Area Manager	NPWS

Incident Controllers Email Address: Allyn.Purkiss@rfs.nsw.gov.au
Incident Control Centre: Coonabarabran Fire Control Centre
Address: 51 King Street, Coonabarabran, NSW, 2357
Postal Address: PO Box 5, Coonabarabran, NSW, 2357
Tel No: 02 6842 2645
Fax No: 02 6842 2932

Declaration applies from 1100 hours on 13 January 2013 until further notice.