

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

Name: Mr Anthony Ellis

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Partially Confidential

TO WHOM IT CONCERN.

I am writing this submission in support of the incidents that claim the RFS has developed into an organisation of bullies which takes no notice of local knowledge and completely disregards local volunteers in a Section 44 situation.

I support these claims by the fact that at the 2001 Goobang National Park fire as the local Captain I was in charge of the fire before Section 44 was declared. When the Section 44 was declared local knowledge and expertise were replaced by Bureaucratic bungling and so called technology.

As fire is common in this range, with my 40 years of personal experience, and having been on the same fire ground as other fire fighters who's memories went back many more years longer than myself, and other local volunteers, we now know very well where and how the fire will behave.

In the interest of being as brief as possible I will relate to you just the facts of what took place.

As had been common practise when fires started in the Northern end of the Park, Volunteers and National Parks Officers established a back burn on the eastern side of the Park to be in front of the fire by night fall. The back burn was approximately 8Kms long and far enough in front of the fire to give us breathing space over night.

The Volunteers and the Local NPWS Officer who was in charge considered this to be safe and that the resources we had at the time could maintain the back burn.

We received instruction from Fire Control situated in Peak Hill some 25Kms away we where to extend the back burn a further 24Kms to the Baldry Road.

The feeling against this was so strong on the fire ground, we sent the NPWS Fire Officer by Helicopter to Fire Control to argue the imminent danger of such a huge back burn and the fact we did not have sufficient resources to maintain approximately 30Kms of back burn. However on his return, he informed us that the back burn had to go in as ordered.

Amid much misgiving the volunteers established the back burn. I informed Fire Control that with 53Km/Hr winds forecast for the next day there would be no way the back burn could be contained.

As is now recorded by history the back burn escaped and burnt thousands of acres of farm land, live stock and fencing. It was only the hard work of volunteers., houses were not lost and the fire was kept out of the town of Yeoval.

It was out of the mismanagement of this fire, myself and [REDACTED] were driven to form the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association. It has been most evident travelling the state with this organisation, every single district has a tale of major bullying and intimidation coupled with complete incompetence by a number of RFS Officers.

There are certainly local officers in some areas who are doing a great job of Administration only to be hampered by red tape and bureaucratic empire building.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Tony Ellis

Group Captain Orana Team.