

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

Organisation: Warrumbungle Fire Action Group

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Partially Confidential

General Purpose Standing Committee Enquiry No 5

I am a landowner in the Warrumbungle region and as such was involved with some of the RFS landowner fire fighters. My husband and son fought in two different Brigades in the fire. It was evident in the early stages that there were many concerns relevant to the management of the fire.

Although I was not actively involved in fighting the Wambelong Fire, I realized what a huge community concern it had become and decided to document the events for two reasons:

- 1 To use my Psychotherapy training to support and hopefully unburden some of the Captains of Brigades and their wives, by helping them to talk about their experiences and thereby have a true and honest account of their situations and
- 2 To make known to those in authority the many problems encountered during the fires.

In some ways I became a medium for the issues of the seven Captains I approached. They were exhausted, traumatized and incapable of putting together a movement for change. As other like- minded people came on board, we gradually created a small group and have been able, through the assistance of the Shooters and Fishers Party, to achieve an Enquiry into this catastrophic event.

To follow, under the headings of Management, Prevention, Chain of Command, Local Response and Communication, I have collated evidence that will, I hope, define and clarify our brief which is to aim for change in procedure and best practice in fire management.

The following seven transcripts, for which I have permission from each individual to send as submissions, are attached, together with the submission that I have coordinated and written on behalf of our Warrumbungle Fire Action Group.

I am happy to appear before the Enquiry.

Carolyn Lyons OAM
"Parmedman"
GULARGAMBONE NSW 2828

It's the 27th February and we are atwithand

Carolyn: So, just going to ask you both, how long have you lived here?

Mrs... I have lived here since we've been married which is nearly 25 years.

Mr...And I've been here 34 years and my parents were here before that.

Carolyn: So you've had experience with previous fires obviously.

Mr... Yes I've been Captain for 27 years.

Carolyn: So how did you fare with the Warumbungle fires?

Mr... Well, we lost about 500 hectares of good grazing country plus some of our mountain country of course, which was no loss really -or not really. But we lost no livestock and no buildings or house or anything like that; we just lost fences.

Mrs...Round about 3 kilometres we guess.

Mr... Yes that's right.

Carolyn: So are you both happy to answer some questions which have been previously emailed to you for your consideration?

Mr and Mrs... Yes, sure.

Carolyn: **And what do you hope or think might happen to this evidence.**

Mr...**I hope it might help reduce the severity of another fire somewhere, maybe, and maybe that we can learn something useful from this fire.**

Carolyn:... So you believe that collating this evidence from your first hand experience will be beneficial.

Mr and Mrs...Yes, well I hope it will be.

Carolyn: Tell me are you worried about any of your mates or friends or families or mates as a result of this fire? Do you think it's been pretty rough on a lot of people?

Mr... Some, yes. Most of our brigade didn't lose much, except our eastern-most resident. He seems to be OK I think. He's only leasing the property from his brother who lives in Canada.

Carolyn: Still, it's the experience of the fire itself, isn't it?

Mr.. I don't think any of our Brigade members are traumatized. No I don't think so.

Carolyn: That's good

Mrs.. I think it has been an overwhelming experience though, even if they haven't been personally burnt out. I think even those that put in long hours fighting it. It has been a pretty full on experience for quite a few weeks.

Carolyn: (Mr) you lost quite a few hours sleep didn't you and I think (Mrs) you did too.

Mr... Yes. It was tough enough here, but nothing like over the eastern side. They copped the brunt of it and possibly the northern side to a degree. You were talking about Bugaldie. Ours was a much more manageable outbreak, if that's what you'd call it.

Carolyn: Terrifying nevertheless.

Mrs... Yes it was, it was. That night it came in – not knowing where we were going to be able to stop it..Yes it was a very traumatic time.

Mr...It was a harrowing experience. Wondering where's this going to stop, how much are we going to lose, you know....

Mrs...It's not just that night. It's been full on for a month in the recovery phase in various ways after the fires. So really it's been very hard to step back and take stock and get on and do normal day to day things basically.

Carolyn: Yes, well it just doesn't walk away does it? I don't think people in the cities and the towns have any idea. They think the fires gone so everything is back to normal again. They don't think about the trauma and the emotional drain. I've talked with people who say they close their eyes and they see fire – a month later. You have all been through it.

So I'll just ask you a few questions:

What is the National Park's fire plan to your knowledge? Do you believe that the Park has been maintained to a proper safety level?

Mr...I believe they tried to do some hazard reduction. But in my books, hazard reduction is fairly ineffectual; in a lot of cases it doesn't even burn the logs. It crawls around and doesn't really achieve much. *I think there's more that they could do and the Green lobby have a lot to answer for in what they stopped them doing. The build up of fuel was huge and the result was obviously devastating. People, particularly the Green lobby, have got to realise that fires will happen – not might happen – they will happen, and that the amount of fuel*

determines the intensity of the devastation. So any way to reduce or keep the fuel load down to a minimum level has to be a strategy.

Carolyn: So procedures must be addressed and changed.

Mr... yes, well things need to change in the yearly operation of the National Parks. They just have to realise that fires will happen and if they happen as they did on such a catastrophic day, the effects are absolutely traumatic.

Carolyn: So do you believe that they should annually set up fire breaks on the perimeter of the park?

Mr... To be realistic, to maintain a full grid of fire breaks is possibly beyond the taxpayer's ability to fund it. In my books, maybe a grid of GPS'd fire trail routes should be logged. The first response is critical. They need to have aircraft available quickly and I believe that a bull dozer should be able to turn up within an hour and that teams such as RAFFT teams, (Remote Area Fire Fighting Teams) should be readily available – and more than one. It would all have to happen within the first few hours of the fire. It needs to happen quickly, otherwise you lose it. After a few hours, depending on the conditions, it's almost too late.

Carolyn: So, were you notified of the fire.

Mr... Yes, but informed by a local brigade member.

Carolyn: OK – so my next question is: were you satisfied with the chain of command?

Mr.. Probably not: but I wasn't privy to the communication traffic between the person on the ground and the headquarters. It was a National Park fire and we weren't on their radio channel. So I didn't know what was happening.

Mrs... But doesn't it depend on whether it's at the very first stage? I mean we believe that *we* let the National Parks know that there was a fire going on that Saturday afternoon. So it depends whether you're speaking of the chain of command, initially, or two or three days down, when it was at the disaster stage. That was completely different and that was between the National Parks or the RFS- who was in charge there, I don't know. But on that very first afternoon, the chain of command was a bit – I mean it was really National Park....

Mr... It was a National Park fire that first afternoon and that was the only time it could have been contained. It had to happen that Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. I do believe that not enough happened – in hindsight, more should have happened.

Carolyn: More aircraft support?

Mr... More aircraft support. A bull dozer should have been there. Now where the closest bull dozer was – I don't know. It didn't happen. I learnt afterwards that maybe a bull dozer

could have been put in and contained that fire when it was possibly only 20 hectares. Now I stand corrected on that information, but that was my information. But it needed to happen and it could have happened. After that it got too big, by Sunday midday, it was beyond control and the weather conditions were such that it was going to be uncontrollable.

Mrs...Carolyn can I just add here, because it's I think it's the right place to say this. I couldn't contact my husband or my son that evening and it was near dark, between 7 and 8. I hadn't heard anything and I knew they would need something to eat and drink, so I just drove in there and found them. At that stage they had been asked if they would be on patrol overnight, (this is my husband and son,) because the National Parks were going to come back the next day with whatever resources. I just want to say here that my gut feeling – and I didn't have the ins and outs of what it was up to and I don't have the training, but my strongest gut feeling I had was – I just couldn't believe that it was going to be left. I just couldn't believe that they weren't going to do more that night. I don't know what, but to say you couldn't see – well you could! The firelight gave you enough that you could see. There was no wind – it wasn't raging. Knowing that the weather was going to be bad next day, my gut feeling was – I can't believe why they are not doing more to-night. Don't know what, but I just couldn't believe they weren't doing anything else.

Carolyn: So you are answering one of the questions already and that was: Were you left to handle the fires alone because the RFS and National Park members had done their hours and gone home? Did you experience a 9-5 mentality even though the danger was extreme?

Mrs... Well on that night I know some National Parks' members had gone home, but I know they came back through the night a few hours later. But I think there was a gap there when they weren't at their fire (but I will stand corrected on that). But, on other occasions, throughout the fire, definitely it happened. Whether they didn't have someone to take over from them immediately or just simply "Time's up – we've got to go" and there was no compromise on that. There was no "let's just step back and let's have a look is it right that we should go now - or can I go on for a few longer hours". I firmly believe that that policy is far too rigid. We managed to keep going; sure, we ran on adrenaline; it was our own fire on our own property, so you can keep going for longer hours. But their policy, especially those who were given command. There was a person who was divisional commander for our property and you just got to know them and they're off for four days. Well I believe they should have stuck to their job until the bitter end. Bring you swag, roll it out somewhere; book into the nearest accommodation; take your 6 or 8 hours or whatever when you need the rest, but I believe if you've been given a command for a certain segment of that fire, then you shouldn't leave it. Plenty of us worked for weeks on end without a day off. Sleep, you can't go without, food, you can't go without, but days off – I believe you can go without – especially in circumstances like this. We were all running in overdrive.

Carolyn: It has been said there were probably two hours, which is the least amount of time between shifts, sometimes it was 3 to 4 hours before they came back.

Mr and Mrs... Yes we have heard that.

Carolyn: So that 9 to 5 mentality doesn't work with a fire. You can't tell the fire to stop...

Mrs... And that happened on the night our fire jumped containment lines and came in. There was National Parks fellow who is a sensible one we talk about. He was there, it had just jumped the containment lines and he was advised that he should leave. He asked if he could stay because it was a critical point and he was told under no circumstances could he say he wanted to leave – in quite an emphatic way. I can't see why he wasn't allowed to stay. We were all there to look after each other; if he was going to fall over with drowsiness or whatever we would have been there; why can't it extend to National Parks crew as well? Whether they have done it for so long they just accept it and they just do it. I think there are a few in there who would quite happily stay on because they really do want to see something to the end or something stopped. But I think that 9 to 5 mentality is something that's got to be looked at.

Carolyn: The landowners can go for so long – not necessarily on their own place – on other people's places with their Brigades. They can do it.

Mrs... I am not asking them to go days and days without sleep. It's just a moderation of that rule: it's just a bit more common sense needed.

Carolyn: and your point about people being relieved of command after being on site for a certain amount of time and then given 4 days off - with no notification of that. So they come in green to the fire – no idea where the last tree was that was alight... it's a waste of time.

Mrs.... Being a divisional commander for a certain area, is not just about knowing the terrain, it's getting to know the people you are working with. Some of the fire captains and their deputies and the faces that are there and then having confidence in your ability as a commander to take control and to have confidence that they will get the resources when they're needed and that they know what they're doing because they know where the fire is and they know what has to be done. But they go off and it's changed to somebody else, you don't know what sort of a handover they have had...

Carolyn: It just doesn't work. So that's another procedure we have to address for change.

Mr and Mrs.... Yes yes

Carolyn: Were you satisfied with the lines of communication between the organizations and the volunteer brigades.

Carolyn; Organizations: the RFS or the National Parks. They were the people put in; a lot of them were paid and a lot of them were doing just their 9 to 5 hours. But were you satisfied with the communication?

Mr... To a degree I was, but it took a while to get through sometimes to the Control Centre. I hate to be critical when things are very busy and dangerous situations are happening in other areas. Ours was over on that Monday night. I don't know what was happening at the Centre. They did ring reasonably regularly, so it wasn't too bad.....

Mrs... On that Sunday evening when we were wanting to do back burning here, we weren't fully aware of how critical it was on the northern and the eastern side, but we can't jump up and down about not being listened to when all hell was breaking loose on the other side.

But then, they also need to trust us, trust our Captains that they know what to do too. We don't need to be treated like idiots – waiting for a command from up above.

Mr... Absolutely. **The decision to backburn has got to be the Captains' decision.** We cannot wait for someone to come from Headquarters to come and have a look at it. That is simply ridiculous. It has happened; if conditions are right, we have to go now, so we go now. As far as waiting for permission to burn, I just take no notice of them whatsoever. They can sack me if they like – I've been trying to get out of the job for the last 5 years.

Mrs... Let's just say that was a critical decision and it was one well made. Very early Monday morning when it started in our neighbour's property and that was a critical decision which resulted in the fire being much less dramatic.

Mr... We stopped it for that Monday day and it was on the Monday night that a strong wind came up and it broke the containment lines.

Mrs... It was a decision not to continue with the back burn too far because there was so much grass that I could have started another bushfire.

Mr.. The fire was well back, so I thought we'll wait until the next night. But the problem was that we had a blackout on the Sunday night – a 24 hour blackout, so I couldn't get any weather forecast. I suppose I should have asked someone. But if I'd had the computer operational we would have realised that the easterly wind was going to be strong and maybe I would have continued with the backburn early Monday morning.

Carolyn: But wouldn't you think that the command centre would have been aware of the different aspects of the fire and notified the fire captain.

Mr... Maybe they should have, yes.

Mrs... I think the whole thing was just chaotic. And let's remember that this is not an organised event. It happens and that where the skill of organization comes in. We don't

want to lose sight of that. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. I don't know that they had the resources to say 'those people over that side need to back burn'.

Mr... They wouldn't have known what stage we were up to I don't think. I don't know how much information was being looked at, such as aerial mapping of the fire etc. Don't know if there was anyone looking at our situation.

Carolyn: Nevertheless. Huge fire, encompassing a large area: 'The Warrumbungle Fire'. I can't understand why a chain of command, with all the epaulets and the white shirts and the structure which they have – which is often used to great benefit for a lot of people – I can't understand why it doesn't work, when there's such a tragedy about to happen.

Mr... In a way, it had already happened on Sunday afternoon – unbelievably fast I think. I don't think anyone was aware how far and how fast that fire was going to move. **I myself have never seen a fire go so far so fast in these mountains. I think maybe people should have realised how much it was going to do.**

Carolyn: It was a tinderbox!

Mrs... Gut feeling...

Mr. Conditions were catastrophic plus

Carolyn: What else do you wait for before you get organising things?

Do you think that there should have been a command centre at Gumin Gumin? It has been said that the Coonamble centre was not represented; but I have since found out that there was a strike force sent by Coonamble to Gumin Gumin.

Mr.. Is that right?

Carolyn: Would you agree that communication between the command centres is under question – ie Coonabarabran and Coonamble.

Mrs...**If there was a command centre at Gumin – we didn't even know it was there.**

Mr... If there was one there, I was not contacted by it.

Carolyn: **I think it was a strike force scene, rather than a mobile command centre, which, by the way apparently was sitting in Coonamble waiting with 16 or 17 people and nothing happened.**

Mr and Mrs... We didn't know anything about that.

Carolyn: We are talking about your experience doing a fire fighting course.

Mrs... yes the first course I did with the RFS during the year in about August. It was just the basic fire fighter course. I did it more because you don't seem to be able to turn around without having a certificate or a course. I did it simply to be a back up because there are less and less people in Brigades capable of doing things, so it's just to be able to do more basically. The course just seems to be so structured around the trucks (meaning) they think no body ever fights a fire with anything else except your truck. Well, that's so far from the truth. Here, the first things at fires are four wheel drives with tanker trailers, they are here fast. They don't have the volume of water of trucks – but not far behind though. It's about the speed in which they can get here and ability for quick access and fires can be put out very quickly. That's happened numerous times; we know it works – we just know it works. And to hear some RFS employer taking the course to say that he is laughed at when he talks about tanker-trailers when he goes to Sydney or coastal meetings and they say 'Oh, your'e not using those old things"! He says he stands up and fights for them. He can see that they are a very worthwhile piece of equipment. Good on him – I hope it keeps it up. As was quoted in the paper, they are the mosquito brigade – they are there first.

Mr...And they are cost effective. Very cost effective. That's what seems to be missing in this whole RFS bureaucracy. They just waste so much money. They could buy 20 to 30 of these tanker- trailers for the price of a fire truck.

Mrs... They used to fund these tanker-trailers. If we could still get equipment to hoses and nozzles and that sort of thing and help with maintaining them – that would be really worthwhile money and nothing compared to what they waste money on with other things.

Carolyn: Are you in a position to ask for that money for that purpose from the RFSA?

Mrs...I don't think the RFSA fund that sort of thing. I thought they funded more for the personal welfare of members – not so much their equipment. But I might be wrong on that.

Mr...But as far as I am aware there are no more tanker-trailers being supplied – haven't been for a long time, but they are at least registering them and inspecting them annually, if you are in the Castlereagh Zone. I also believe they could make them better with a personell compartment on the hitch. They could be made better and safer – that was their excuse – that they weren't safe – but they would be with a personell compartment on them. But that would mean new tanker-trailers, but they don't want to do that do they? This cost of everything- it just astounds me – the way they waste money. They don't make money stretch like we do, to achieve the most effective result.

Carolyn: So, Mrs... you were out there on a motor bike with your son?

Mrs... Yes certainly. Well, when the fire came into our place – I really don't know times – it was all after dark, we had stock in three of what we considered to be the safest paddocks. When it did break out we had quite a response which was heartening to see. Lots of crews came to help out. One of them was not interested in anything else but saving the house, I realized after a little while, which is good, you do want protection there. They were here for asset protection only.

Mr... House assets only.

Mrs... They didn't want to venture too far past the house. We had a cottage and some sheds but that took a bit of convincing.

Mr... They didn't know what stock were!!

Mrs... It was all very stressful that night, they – I'll just call them 'out-of towners' - (these crews that came from elsewhere) didn't virtually do anything until their group leader arrived. They just had to wait and de-brief or whatever. I started to talk about stock but I just got blank looks. So I realised there was no point in talking to them about where our livestock were. Anyway they asked if they could look around the houses and they did that and reversed their trucks around the house and rolled their hoses out and that's where they were staying. I don't want to sound ungrateful for that because it would have been dreadful to lose a house and I really feel for those that have. I would have felt safe if there were one or maybe two trucks around; we knew what the likely hood was of the fire coming close to the house. We really weren't too worried about it getting right up to the house. It was all graded and there was no much fuel on the ground. Anyway, fortunately, another 10 or so units came, local fire fighters, with their tanker-trailers and their trucks. So as there was no point in all of us sitting here and watching everything burn, so we organised the local brigades to meet up at the cattle yards, about 300 metres from the house, and then we explained that the livestock were in three paddocks and asked if they were prepared to go into these paddocks and defend the stock from the fire. We explained that the first paddock had a fresh stand of lucerne and a mob of freshly weaned calves in there.

Carolyn: Your future?!

Mrs... Most certainly, next year's income! So we were quite sure that that paddock would be safe because of the green lucerne. The next paddock had a stand of perennial, improved pasture with 8 cows plus their bull calves and some expensive bulls. That was a little less safe. The following paddock was the one we were most worried about; 140 cows and calves and they were in a short consul love grass paddock which still had a tinge of green; we knew it would burn but not very quickly if the fire got in there. We went in convoy along the road and dispatched two to three crews in each paddock and just asked them to do their best. But we felt they could fight the fire on the northern flank, but made sure they were aware of

where they could get out if they needed to. But everybody was very willing and very co-operative and very capable.

Carolyn: These were the locals?

Mr and Mrs... Yes. Very indebted to them: they understood about stock!!

Mrs... Well, into the early hours of the morning my son and I were in the third paddock along with 140 cows and calves and two trucks. We managed to muster the cows into a corner furthest from the fire and we were just watching. They behaved really well and just stood in a corner. The fire took some time to come across the top of the hill. We were wondering why it had slowed. My son and I were on bikes and there were two other trucks.

Carolyn:and – where were you

Mr... I was back here in the hilux trying to figure out where the fire was going to be pulled up. It actually did pull up on the lucerne paddock and I was wondering about other paddocks to the east whether they were going to stop it or not. I was just trying to get a handle what was happening.

Carolyn: But there does seem to be an inability by town and city dwellers to understand our situations. How we educate people that actually this is how we make a living?

Mrs....Yes, I know - it's just grass, they're just cows, just paddocks. I don't know. There is empathy there, I don't want to be too critical and there is a lot of willingness to help. In the time afterwoods, we have had BlazeAid here and there are lots of people who want to help. I don't want to be too critical of the people who defended the house, they did a very capable job.

Carolyn: They couldn't see that there was anything more important to you.

Mrs... We did manage to stop the fire, my son went up to have a look and it had hit an old fire break and come to a creek which slowed it down.

Mr...The big lucerne paddock stopped a lot of it and narrowed the front right up. On that Monday we'd actually got the grader firebreak around the mountain, which I had been working on for a number of years. It's been a GPS'd line all the way around these mountains and so it was contained below that as well. I got a grader in on Sunday evening and we put the break in up our eastern boundary, because that's where it did eventually jump the top end of it where we hadn't back burned; we got half way up and thought there was too much grass up here – we'll start another bush fire, so we'd wait until the next night, and that was the night it broke us. Anyway, it stayed on the bottom of this graded break around the mountains. It worked, it contained the front above this quite long lucerne paddock.

Mrs... So the front would only have been a couple of hundred metres.

Carolyn: **So the fire break has proven to be a necessity.**

Mr and Mrs... Oh yes absolutely.

Mrs... I need to say something here. thought that last year, because of the growth that we've had over the wet years, it was going to be a very bad fire dangerous year. As it turned out last summer was wet and also not very hot so wasn't a dangerous year at all. But of course we always knew there was going to be a dangerous year – as sure as night follows day. It was going to happen. He was enticed quite a few years ago by an RFS person (named) at an annual meeting that we should apply for funding to put a break around our mountain brigade.

Mr... around the Walga range, tying it into one of the National Parks' fire trails – the Burby Trail – which we did. We GPS'd it all and I had our section all slashed and ready to be graded. That's what happened on the Monday, I had this grader and I got it put in there and it was very handy – it could have actually contained the fire, and then we used it a few days later after the fire was up in the mountains to back burn.

Mrs... **We didn't even know you could apply for money**, but a few meetings ago – going back a few years, **we were encouraged to apply for funding to get graders or bulldozers in to actually put in the line to make it accessible and to clear it** . You can only do the grading just when the fire's going to happen. You can't have it graded every year because of erosion. You need to have it accessible; you need gateways through fences, whether it's boundaries or other paddock fences and that's all cost. But even though we were encouraged to apply for money – **it didn't eventuate**. That would have been really useful money to be spent. Our Brigade goes around the Walga range; it's got a lot of frontage to either National Parks or just rugged mountain country. So that would have been fantastic to have that in place. But it was left to individual landowners to do it. Most could see the huge benefit and many did some degree of preparation well before the fire -some degree -not all and not enough preparation in some cases. There was a lot of hurried preparation when the fire was happening. But the whole concept of having that prepared break – we knew how important it was.

Mr.. .As the fire progresses, you back burn. You don't get too far ahead otherwise you're starting another fire. That's where we got caught on the Monday evening; a big wind got up and it beat us; we didn't get the rest of the backburn in going up this way.

Carolyn: Does it come back to response?

Mr... Basically, it's weather conditions. We possibly could have done it on the early Monday morning, when I'd done the first part of it, but I wasn't game. There was too much

grass and we were starting a new fire. I thought I will wait till Monday evening – and it was a long way away, but all of a sudden this wind got up and it just raced through all the grass on our neighbour's country.

Mrs... So even in hindsight in that situation, I think it's fair to say there's not much else you could have done.

Mr... No. We managed to tie it off to a rocky creek and even that was enough of an issue to get the grass country under control until we were waiting for the Monday evening to continue. Also to get another track fixed up on a neighbour's place. It's just a beetle track.

Carolyn: Have you got areas up here where they don't live on the place? Is that the reason the fire break is not maintained?

Mr... Well...yes, your'e talking about this **fire break. Funding was supposed to be available to do the thing and then they just pulled the funding.**

Mrs... In regards to that, I don't know there's anyone that is absentee so that's not a reason they didn't do it, strictly speaking.

Mr...No but some of them are half hearted about it.

Mrs... It's fair to say too, that not all members can see the importance of it, brigade members that is, who have close proximity to the mountains. Hopefully this fire will show them just how important it is.

Mr...To me they (the RFS) just waste money on other things and important things like this just get pushed aside. What do we want a blinking microwave in our brigade station for? Why do we want all this rubbish?

Carolyn: Do you have a defibrilator in your truck? Do you know how to use it?

Mr... Yes we have, there's instructions in apparently. When you turn it on it tells you. I've never used it.

Carolyn: What about other equipment, is your's air conditioned?

Mr...Yes it is, but I don't drive it, I'm the Captain and I'm busy trying to make strategy.

Carolyn: Does it have a chain saw and a ladder.

Mr... Yes a chainsaw but I don't think it's got a ladder.

Carolyn: So do they come around and check your equipment?

Mr...It goes in for an annual inspection at the Shire. I think they just do a road worthy on the truck. But that's up to our Brigade to make sure what is there; we can't expect them to do everything because if we do, we will be just as bad as them.

Carolyn: A lot of people haven't had some of the equipment that others have had. So your'e saying it's up to them to make sure it's there.

Mr...It was put there when the truck was purchased. So, if it's not there it's probably our fault.

Carolyn: On another tack, we, as landholders are held very strictly to our OH & S regulations. It seems there's no such thing as a mistake – 'it's your fault' regardless and yet there were brigades from away with people who were deemed to be morbidly obese and unable to be active. Do you agree that OH & S should apply in this case?

Mr Probably should yes, it does seem that the RFS has a problem with obesity, doesn't it!

Mrs... Look, it seems that you can't be a policeman or join the army – professions where they need to be active and have a certain level of physical ability. Let's bring in the RFS too! It seems pretty basic. I would think that's a very difficult job. You are normally fighting fires in very hot weather – you need to be fit.

Mr...But the RFS personell do not fight fires. They drive around; they don't have anything to do with actual active fire fighting – and they get away with being obese.

Carolyn: So why are they there?

Mr...I know – why are they there? What do they do, I know. That's right. To a degree they organise equipment, air support or more units. You request and they find out who they can get, so they do have that role and they are quite good at that, I think they do try their best to get you support or whatever.

Carolyn: Do they have more direct access to the Command Centre than you?

Mr...You talk where ever you can get commication, whether it's your Group Captain or who ever. It works alright I think. I'm not super critical of that part. It's the money they waste annoys me. They are there to put fires out, not to do all the other rubbish they do; it annoys me; heaps of correspondence, whether you've got a pedophile in your brigade or whatever.

Carolyn: Well, it's a bureaucracy.

Mr... It goes overboard doesn't it – totally overboard.

Mrs .. .The bottom line is, we are not paid, so all that periferal issues that haven't got to do with fighting fires or maintaing or getting equipment and all that sort of thing - it's just a burden and we don't want to have anything to do with it. doesn't want to be Captain, but a large part of that is because he is sick of the bureaucracy. That's what he is tired of doing. I am thinking, I will try and help him out with that, but there is so much that he has to do himself anyway such as going to meetings, but it's just too much.

Mr...and they're dreaming it up, aren't they, in headquarters, just to justify their position. I can imagine what happens down there 'what can we do to annoy these buggers'...

Thank you both very much – I really appreciate your time.

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Carolyn: You were talking about the role that women played in this fire.

Mrs... There were women on tanker trailers and many were behind the scenes doing very important work, checking the water, the stock and so on. There was a group of women who off their own bat fed many of the local firefighters.

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