

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

Name: Mr Andrew Young

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No.5
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

I've read many of the transcripts from the submissions and the public forums which have made me enter this late submission.

I've been a member of the RFS for just over twenty years now in various roles. During the last ten years the service has come forward in leaps and bounds. Some of these changes may be giving many people and/or members the idea that they don't have a say in what goes on at a fire. I believe this is a misconception. I believe a lot of the issues about local control come from the lack of understanding on how the RFS Incident Control System works.

During this fire I saw the need to conduct back burning in the area I was working. I gave the necessary information that might be needed to seek approval that it was safe to conduct a back burn. Five minutes later I was given the permission to proceed. The reason that I sought permission to proceed with a back burn has nothing to do with the fire being run by outsiders or staff? This safeguard is in place as the IMT (Incident Management Team) has information and knowledge of the whole fire scene and I am in control of only one part. It takes into account crews who may be working behind the area I may intend to burn, or this burn could be affected by weather conditions I have yet to be informed of.

During the Wambelong fire I worked with many crews, local and out of area. I found that if I asked an out of area crew to do something for me, they did as I asked. I supplied them with all the information they required so that they could see that I knew what I was talking about. For out of area crews this is often just explaining that those livestock/fences/grass are more valuable than the dwelling that they have been asked to protect.

In response to the comments made about not being notified of the fire! I was aware of this fire as well as others Saturday afternoon; I make a point of keeping up to date with what fires might be in our zone and elsewhere by the use of the internet and active vigilance. On Sunday morning my family and I were returning from Coonabarabran and could see that the smoke cloud was larger than when we went to town. I discussed with my wife that we would have lunch and make ourselves available for tasking. I rang the Coonabarabran control centre and told them I had a crew of four ready to go wherever they needed us. We came to the fire control centre to await further instructions on which fire we would be attending. A triple 000 call came through at that point which saw us travel toward a lightning strike between Binnaway and Mendooran Rd. After containing that fire with three other trucks we attended a fire on the Black Stump Road, before ending up at the Wambelong fire.

I don't believe you should always wait to be called to assist. Brigades and individuals can call and offer assistance. It saves valuable time for those that are trying to prepare, warn and protect the community.

I feel all these issues I have commented on that were raised at the Coonabarabran Public forum, had been dealt with and acknowledged at the After Action Review's that were conducted post fire.

Regards Andrew Young

Napier Lane BFB Captain