

## INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

**Organisation:** Warrumbungle Shire Council

**Date received:** 31/01/2014

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Partially Confidential

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Calls from within Shire  
1300 795 099

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Coonabarabran:  
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Coolah: 02 6378 5000

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Coonabarabran - Coolah - Dunedoo - Baradine - Binnaway - Mendooran

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Please address all mail to:  
The General Manager

Please refer enquiries to: **Joanne Hadfield**

31 January 2014

The Director,  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Legislative Council,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000.

Dear Sir/ Madam

**Re: Inquiry into the Wambelong Fire.**

On behalf of the Warrumbungle Shire Council (WSC) I hereby lodge a submission for the Inquiry into the Wambelong Fire. The fire started in the National Park on Saturday 12 January 2013. National Parks rang 8.30am on Sunday 13 January 2013 requesting the council grader. Council's LEMO was [redacted] (WSC's Fleet Manager) was first on call. Starting Monday there were WSC supervisors, crews, managers and administration staff in the control centre and out in the field 24/7. Water tanks and stop n go were also provided 24/7. Council arranged generators for Baradine when the power went down. WSC's heavy machinery plant was utilized as well as normal vehicles.

WSC remained at the front of Recovery Operations. Areas of such leadership include the support provided to asbestos clean up, making Recovery locations available and acceptance of the role of Ministry of Police and Emergency Services (MPES). Examples of WSC's flexibility in decision making include the creation of the Mayor's Appeal Fund and the use of donated funds to fix roadside fencing outside of shire boundaries.

A Recovery Centre was established on Friday 18 January 2013 at the Coonabarabran Shire Community Hall, 27 – 29 John St, Coonabarabran. The centre operated from 8am to 6pm seven days a week. WSC supported the centre by providing multiple staff, equipment, support and two Recovery Centre Managers who did an outstanding job. The Coonabarabran Recovery Centre operated from 18 January 2013 to 8 March 2013 at Coonabarabran Council Community Hall and received a total of 1324 intakes. On

8 March 2013, the Recovery Centre moved to the Warrumbungle Shire Council chambers providing a modified as needs service through council representatives. The recovery centre closed far too soon and there are members of the community that are still struggling to keep things together and cannot face rebuilding. There is a massive hole left when the assistance was withdrawn.

Council staff continue to work with the community and government agencies to help in the process of the recovery effort to date. Public meetings were facilitated by Council staff and me at the Coonabarabran Bowling Club and the Bugaldie Community Hall. Council produced newsletters starting 25 January 2013 with information supplied by the Disaster Welfare Committee to ensure that fire affected residents were properly informed.

Council waived landfill fees for demolition material from the affected fire area only, and provided free garbage bins and recycle crates to fire effected residents. Water quality was also monitored closely after the fire.

WSC has shown true community leadership during and after the Wambelong Fire but this has come at great expense to the Council financially. We are a close knit community and the fire has also impacted personally on Council's staff, with some of the staff in the Environmental Services team terminating their employment due to the emotional drain.

Costings of the expense to the Warrumbungle Shire Council are provided.

I am very proud to boast that, WS, in conjunction with other government agencies, developed a comprehensive asbestos management plan that is now being used nationally and internationally.

WSC lent staff to the Blue Mountains fire event to assist in recovery and asbestos clean up.

The cost impact on our shire will be felt for years to come. Our main tourism icon was destroyed and in many cases will never recover. A large sector of the rural sector was burnt out and now is

in the grip of crippling drought. Many farm dams were depleted by the aerial fire fighting offensive. The dollar impact on Council is \$2.6 million with an unrecoverable value at \$600,000 . Regional councils cannot sustain a financial hit of this magnitude without service levels suffering.

Council is very grateful for the assistance given by all agencies, however the pledges of financial assistance and the actual result don't match up. Many hours have been spent battling with Treasury, Public Works and other agencies that are involved in the assessment process to try and recover outstanding funds.

I am extremely proud of the way Council staff stepped up to defend their community and we express our humble gratitude to the hundreds of volunteers who came to help our community. Finally, I am pleased to praise the combat and management efforts of the Rural Fire Service (RFS). In any emergency event things could always have been done better .WSC has participated in a number of post fire debrief and "lessons learnt" forums and I trust that those discussions have lead to improvements in operational matters.

Statistics for the Fire show:

- Fatalities 0
- Injuries FF 28 (no critical injuries)
- Civilian 1
- Homes 53
- Outbuildings 131
- Pasture 33,060 ha (est) Total 53,000 hectares of land (National Park & Crown Land)
- Sheep 850 (est)
- Cattle 320 (est)
- Fences 1700 Kms (est)
- Other 2.7m (est)
- Fence around Timor Dam (town water supply) was ruined at a cost of \$200,000.

Yours faithfully

**STEVE LOANE**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**

<b>Losses for Council</b>		
<i>Losses quantifiable via claims to other levels of government</i>		
Cost of road repairs (incl silt)	221,506.00	
Tree removal	160,000.00	
Dead water pump	600,000.00	(Estimate – awaiting engineer feedback)
Swimming Pool Sails	15,000.00	(Awaiting assessor)
Damage to Timor dam fence, pump house, toilet, solar signs etc	370,000.00	(Insurance value only)
<b>Total Quantifiable Losses</b>	<b>1,366,506.00</b>	
<i>Un-quantifiable losses (not identified in claims process)</i>	<b>50,000.00</b>	(estimate only)
<b>Total estimated loss to Council</b>	<b>1,416,506.00</b>	
<b>Impact on cost of doing business - Council</b>		
<i>Costs of doing business quantifiable via claims to other levels of government</i>		
Cost of Asbestos clean up (Council only)	557,600.72	Reimbursed \$486,722.19 (\$70,878.53 cost to Council)
Cost of managing Disaster Recovery Centre	127,082.96	
Cost of Initial incident response per claim (excl items charged directly)	221,425.83	
Cost of items charged directly during initial response	154,559.02	
<b>Total Quantifiable Losses</b>	<b>1,060,668.53</b>	
<i>Un-quantifiable losses (not identified in claims process)</i>		
Management of Mayor's fund (staff time)	40,000.00	(see below)
Development Application fees waived	5,000.00	(Rough estimate only - final value unknown)
Donations of heavy plant	11,309.00	(per ledger although still ongoing)
Disaster Recovery Information & communications costs	20,000.00	(rough estimate of costs above and beyond claim)
Community consultation	20,000.00	(Rough estimate only)
Increased costs around debt collection due to hardship and loss of production	10,000.00	(Rough estimate only)
Additional administrative costs from the fire	100,000.00	(Rough estimate only for all areas of Council)
	<b>206,309.00</b>	
<b>Total estimated cost of doing business</b>	<b>1,266,977.53</b>	
<b>Total Cost to Council</b>	<b>2,683,483.53</b>	