

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

Name: Mr Max Zell OAM

Date received: 30/01/2014

Warrumbungle (Wambalong) Enquiry NO 5

Fire – January 2013

The fire appeared to be deliberately lit, starting in the timber in the creek twice and another further East. The first fire was reported, and after the person left the N.P. (National Parks) to report the fire, the other fires started. The fire could have been contained that afternoon had personnel continued to control the fire.

The next morning crews from rural volunteer brigades NPWS staff should have jointly made decisions. This did not happen, the NPWS staff made the decisions to light back burns on a day that was predicted to be catastrophic weather conditions.

The first back burn fire failed and a further two were lit. The third one was simply out of control and travelled in a Southerly direction, going over personnel in the Visitors' Centre car park. Later in the day, a wind change from the SW took the fire in a NE direction causing loss of homes, sheds, livestock, fences, etc. Had this change been 15 to 20 minutes later, it would have travelled through the town of Coonabarabran.

Decisions taken by the NSW Rural Fire Services after this stage were made without local input causing further unnecessary damage.

I feel the decisions taken would have been more beneficial had the local Fire Brigade Group Captain been allowed to have input. The Warrumbungle NP had not had proper fire breaks constructed and early control burning had not been carried out.

My thoughts are,

- In future there should be full cooperation with local volunteer brigades, from early prevention work as well as during any fire.
- That all fire prevention and control West of the Blue Mountains be under the control of the local government

I was involved in the major fire in the NP in the 1960s

As a past Mayor of the Gilgandra Shire and I would like see the Shires of Warrumbungles, Gilgandra and Coonamble be amalgamated in a timely joining process. The Warrumbungles is shared by these three Shires as well as the total upper catchment of the Castlereagh River.

Maxwell Ian Zell O.A.M.