

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

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Date received: 31/01/2014

Submission to the Inquiry into the Wambelong fire

In this submission I will highlight:

- The impact of the fire on our family
- The fire warning process
- The apparent lack of cooperative approach to fire prevention and management in the area and a recommendation for change.
- The lack of utilization by the relevant Government authorities of agreed strategies for fire prevention and management

The impact of the fire on our family

We live on the Timor Road where I cared full time for my husband who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. I am a retired Mental Health Nurse and was well able to care for him. Our house was the ideal setting for him. The fire on January 13th destroyed the house completely thus rendering us homeless. The best accommodation I could organize was a small caravan put on our property. This of course was not appropriate for my husband and consequently he had to be placed in respite care. His condition has deteriorated suddenly and rapidly since the fire and he has now had to go into full time care. While the financial impact of the fire has been devastating to me it is the premature loss of my husband at home and his deterioration that has been the greatest loss of all and no degree of compensation can help.

The fire warning process

The warning system for those of us in the path of the fire was done initially by messages to mobile phones. We did not receive the messages as there is no mobile phone coverage in our section of the road. The warning that was eventually given via the landline, which was the first of our awareness of the fire, was received just minutes before the fire descended on us and we barely had time for me to prepare my husband and me to leave. There was no time to gather items or even our pets. Consequently everything was lost and we narrowly escaped with our lives.

The apparent lack of cooperative approach to fire prevention and management in the area and a recommendation for change.

In the readings and discussions I have had regarding the fire management strongly suggests that there is no coordination and little cooperation between the agencies responsible for the prevention and

management of bush fires. It seems the priorities of each agency take precedence rather than jointly looking at the best practice approach to the situation.

I recommend that one authority be established such as the one in the Blue Mountains to coordinate the prevention and management of fire in both the Warrumbungle National Park and surrounding rural area.

The lack of utilization by the relevant Government authorities of agreed strategies for fire prevention and management

Again in my reading since the fire I have learned that National Parks and Wildlife agreed to implement the Canobolas Model for hazard reduction. However the model has not been implemented. It is apparently a well thought out strategy designed by groups of trained and experienced people in the field and would have greatly reduced the impact of the fire on the entire environment.