Mr Euan Ferguson AFSM  
Special Enquirer,  
Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry  
Level 6, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
West Perth WA 6005, Australia  
Tel: (+61 8) 94821750  
Email: Waroonainquiry@semc.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Ferguson,

**RE: Waroona Bushfire Special Inquiry Submission**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a submission from the collective Bush Fire Volunteers perspective. As has been acknowledged, we sought assistance with funding and resources via the Premiers Department on the 5th February 2016\(^1\) recognising the short time frame, financial and resources constraints that is affecting our Associations ability to have our submission in by the 4th March 2016. We received a response denying our request on the 23 February 2016.\(^2\)

We as a collective group of associations expressed our concerns\(^3\) via a joint associations statement issued on the 21 January 2016. Our Association is a volunteer based organisation that is reliant on the good will of the volunteers from across Western Australia to undertake many tasks and functions for no reward other than to have the voice of the volunteers heard and their community needs addressed.

Given this, the short time frame has made it extremely difficult to collate, investigate, validate and formulate all the information we have received from the volunteers, who by their nature have expressed most of their views verbally to association representatives. As a consequence there are a number of matters that have been raised that will require further investigation and validation.

Our outreach in this restricted time has been quite extensive with an overwhelming response from the community bush fire volunteers across the state. Our intent is to drill down to what the core issues are, that need addressing from their perspective throughout this review.

We thank you for recognising the important role that the volunteers’ association plays in having their perspectives acknowledged as part of this review as they combined with their respective local Governments provide the most cost effective emergency service to this great state of ours.

If you need to discuss this matter any further, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

DGossage

Dave Gossage AFSM  
A/President  
Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades of Western Australia (inc)  
13 March 2016

---

\(^1\) 2016 02 05 Request for assistance for volunteers for enquiry.pdf  
\(^2\) 2016 02 23 Response from Premier and Cabinet re funding support  
\(^3\) 2016 01 21 Joint Statement Final on bush fire inquiry.pdf
Contents

Preamble .................................................................................................................................................. 3
Terms of Reference .................................................................................................................................. 4
  1. The response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire ........................................................................ 4
  2. Lessons learned from previous bushfire emergencies ............................................................... 7
Emergency Services levy Funding ........................................................................................................... 12
Focus on bush fire management has dissipated .................................................................................. 12
Need for an independent structure ....................................................................................................... 13
How long can we wait for agency collaboration? ................................................................................ 15
Prescribed burning effort must increase and be sustained ................................................................. 16
IMTs – insufficient resources and local participation .......................................................................... 17
Harmonising personnel rules for emergency situations ....................................................................... 18
Emergency effort contingency and recovery fund ............................................................................... 18
Going in harder, earlier with a single command structure .................................................................. 19
Facilitating better volunteer representation ......................................................................................... 19
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................ 20
Preamble

The association is of the position that any review should reflect on the past to enable the areas that support sustainable volunteer cultures to be applied, to build a more sustainable and resilient future for the community. The future needs to be one that the community has meaningful control that embraces sustainable volunteerism and community resilience at the local level.

Such a review takes time, with the review discovering areas that should be explored to enable a better future. It is acknowledged that the restrictive time frame and the narrow terms of reference to explore the past will potentially restrict the positive learnings of the past being overlooked and the potential for mistakes already identified, being repeated into the future which perceivably seems to be where we are today.

It is clear by the feedback that there is a real perceived cultural divide of the volunteer rural/bush fire brigades and the fire fighting technic’s and behaviors being employed by the department, compared to the community needs and the sustainable community principles of building strong resilient communities. A simple analogy is, the more resilient a community is, the fewer incidents there will be, and the less paid services that would be required. This is a direct conflict between an industrial position vs a community position. (Example:- since the installation of fire detection systems and an increase in building code designs there has been a noticeable decline in the building fire area)

The cultural difference between a police/para military model and community based model is clear. One is based on “Command and Control” vs the other is based on “Trust and Respect”, this cultural difference will always be there and it is noted that there is separate services around Australia that work more efficiently than the current model in Western Australia.

History has shown since the demise of the Bush Fires Board in 1998 there has been a steady decline in the ability of the local governments Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades to be heard and have their views and ideas embraced, not to mention their ability to continue to manage incidents that they are capable of. The original intent of the then FESA model was that the agencies would be preserved and for the Bush Fire Brigades the training structures, as one example, would be preserved because of the clear difference between the city and rural needs, this has not been honored to the point where the current training pathways has been designed to suit the career path of the paid staff making it difficult for volunteers.

There has been a noticeable increase of the number of large fires, which has been more obvious in recent years since the establishment of Department of Fire and Emergency Services. There is a real need for a complete restructure and recognition of the four services that are critical to the states future. That is the Local Government Volunteer Bush Fire Service and the State Emergency Service and the paid Park & Wildlife Fire Service and City based Fire & Rescue Services which is Department of Fire and Emergency Services. The fact, according to the auditor general report, page 5, that the largest resource is being managed locally, by local government is a positive move in the context of empowered communities, local control and building resilient communities should be retained.

Government needs to recognise that centralised control models disempower community and has a direct impact on volunteer recruitment, community resilience. This point is highlighted in the auditor general report, page 11, that shows since the inception of their FESA and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services centralised models, volunteerism has taken a downward trend. This is not sustainable and will affect the states resource and financial sustainability into the future, something this state can ill afford.

This has a direct impact on all tiers of government’s budgets and resources when they have to pick up what was traditionally being done by volunteers in the community. Western Australia is protected by a vast network of Volunteers of approximately 30000 volunteers verse 1100 paid staff. This is something the state should celebrate, support and be very proud of. Given that volunteers are just that, there needs to be more effort and focus on supporting them and “going the extra mile” to look after them from all tiers of government, not put processes, procedures and bureaucratic red tape principles verbal and written that stifle initiative and practical common sense thinking/actions. This would encourage a more sustainable volunteerism culture.

In 1987 there was a document presented to the Bush Fires Board on the history of the Bush Fires Board and Local Government Bush Fire Brigades, its conclusion is relevant today as it was then and reads;

**CONCLUSION**

The highly decentralised system of fire control in Western Australia has proved its effectiveness by rapid attack on fire outbreaks which would be difficult to achieve by a centralised system no matter how efficient. It has depended mainly upon the involvement of a large proportion of the rural population in brigade organisation and activity over the years.

Since the Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia Act 1998 and the Emergency Management Act 2005 there has been a shift of responsibility. DFES has been given elements of responsibility removing more local control and disempowering the communities they are meant to support. Since the implementation of FESA and now Department of Fire and Emergency Services there have been a noticeable shift in behaviors from “liaison”, to “coordination” to what we have today which is “command and control”, a top down approach which is in conflict with the sustainable volunteerism culture needed to build community resilience.

Volunteers who are often less resourced, work to save their local area, they work on a relationship of trust and respect and do not respond well to being told what to do by a paid firefighter who has no connection to a local area.

The capacity we have is not operating at its best due to impediments within the current system. Some of the critical recurring problems are intractable within the confines of the current emergency services legal and organisational structures.

Several problems are highlighted to support of our view that major reform is required to create a single independent rural bush fire focused agency that can overcome the intractable problems that are exacerbating the bush fire risk for our communities.

Accordingly, the focus of our submission is with respect to the third Terms of Reference for the Inquiry looking at the bigger picture of our system and how it can be improved to better protect our communities from the ravages of bush fires. We offer some limited feedback in the other areas of the enquiry based on information received from volunteers in the other reference areas within the terms of reference.

**Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for the Inquiry are to examine and report on:

1. **The response to the January 2016 Waroona Fire**
   (a) The effectiveness of pre-incident bushfire prevention and mitigation activities;

   **Comment:** It is not clear as to what was in place in this regard. The bush fire threat map for the state clearly shows that areas that were not bush fire prone were burnt? Critical infrastructures and
mitigation services work undertaken or not are not clear and for some services and infrastructures to fail would indicate that they were not effective?

(b) The effectiveness of emergency management plans and procedures;

Comment:- With an event of this scale it is not clear if there was any planning done in this regard and it is not clear if the plans were effective or not. Given no event is the same; this is when “community resilience” comes into play. An informed, inclusive community, who have ownership of the risks, understand them and deals with them at the time, they adapt to the changing situation as it evolves which was demonstrated to a degree in this fire when the volunteers had control. It is also noted that there has been elements that have been frustrated and believe the bureaucracy of the HMA prevented community reliance to prevail. State policies surrounding access to properties continue to fail the community especially those who make a living off the land who need to be able to tend to their livestock and businesses. Any state policies should be flexible enough to enable the community resilience to be prevailing and enacted in the context of community being affected. The support provided should be of coordination resource, and funding support to the local level.

(c) The effectiveness of the suppression strategies and tactics used during the fire;

Comment:- There has been concerned expressed in regards to local knowledge allegedly being ignored and the inclusion of the local leaders in the decision making process overlooked? We have not had the time or resources to be able to investigate or validate these claims. The strategies and tactics were affected by the availability of resources and personnel to fulfil what was required. It is clear to us that all personnel and the community had to constantly readapt to the rapidly changing environment and they went well beyond what would have been expected by many. There is a perception and concern that rank based decision making at various levels may have led to some frustrations and people from out of area being put into roles, based on rank, rather than utilising local personnel with the capability?

(d) The effectiveness of incident management, including coordination of agencies, volunteer fire and emergency services and interstate assistance;

Comment:- The effectiveness is subjective as there were varying reports that say it was acceptable and some say there was a lot of room for improvement. There were views that the IMT was under resourced. There has been concern expressed as to why resources and personnel from the eastern states were brought in? Was the local state resources utilised to an acceptable level before the decision was made and what liaison was had in regards to the local government volunteer bush fire brigades?

The incident management teams seemed to be resourced extensively by Department of Fire and Emergency Services and Parks and Wildlife (NB: - DPaW actively accept volunteers into senior roles in their incident management team structures), there was a notable absence of experienced volunteer bush fire personnel. Department of Fire and Emergency Services annual report⁶ page 129 refers to a number of personnel being trained to level 2 and 3 in (Bushfire), we have not been able to validate how many of these personnel are Department of Fire and Emergency Services Fire & Rescue, vs Parks and Wildlife vs Local Government Bushfire Volunteers or non-government agency personnel?

We have had views expressed that fair and equitable access to training for volunteers is not being provided in favour of the state HMA agency? How many non-paid staff have had access to and been able to complete this training? It was contextually noticeable that respect for volunteers, by some in an agency, was not at an acceptable level when it came to people fulfilling senior roles. It would be interesting to see how many bush fire volunteers were appointed to divisional commander or above functions, throughout this incident?

(e) Protection of essential services infrastructure and access to essential services (power, transport, water, communications) by emergency services organisations and the community;

Comment:- This has clearly been highlighted in the media and by many in the community as a real issue. From an emergency service point of view concern has been expressed that this did initially cause some concerns in being able to protect the community and communicate with them, this will need further investigation to be able to clearly identify what needs to be done. Contextually critical infrastructure needs to be protected and have redundancy mechanisms in place to provide business continuity within community during times of emergency. This is something that could be incorporated into the local emergency management plans to ensure the community has had meaningful input into the issues. Given that the operative part of emergency management planning has been taken away from the local level and given to the state HMA, issues such as this and more importantly the ability of the local knowledge to be recognised in this context, will mean that the there will be continual and fundamental failures into the future. The loss of HMA status, the merging of wesplan bushfire with wesplan urban fire is a couple of examples of the disempowerment of community and contributes to local issues being missed. The state policies need to change to re-empower local communities. We also recommend that a state stock take be undertaken to identify and plan for the protection of critical infrastructure.

(f) The effectiveness of public messaging including the adequacy and timeliness of emergency warnings issued to residents and visitors;

Comment:- It is clear, from the HMA perspective, that all notifications must come through them. We are of the understanding that messages did go out but the details of timings, we have no access to validate this or not. Feedback has indicated that there was smoke over the towns for days and it would be beneficial to understand the communities concerns in this regard? What has been highlight is the vulnerability of such systems when the infrastructure goes down. One of the first things to be lost is the power, what redundancies are in place to compensate for this? If access and egress is cut, do the back systems, if any, have capacity to operate for a long period of time without human intervention? What is the capacity of the systems to withstand capacity/demand overload? How does the message get through if people don’t have a mobile and landline? There are many situations that should be tested to see where the critical vulnerabilities are to enable better planning for the future.

(g) Effectiveness of assistance to and management of those affected by the fire:
   (i) Evacuation procedures
   (ii) Communications with the community over the course of the fire
   (iii) Provision of welfare support

Comment:- There was some concern expressed in regards to welfare in the field getting to the volunteers on the ground. Given the time frame we have not had the resources or capability to investigate this further. Feedback has been received that the volunteers where happy with the level of support the shires provided them.

(iv) Management of people seeking to return to their properties,

Comment:- There was concern expressed in regards to access and egress during and post fire especially from the farmer response brigades who needed to keep their farms running and move livestock and fodder around. We would support the review of the policy in this regard as traffic management is a real issue and great cause of frustration. Statistically most buildings assets are lost pre and post fire and owners need to be able to return or stay to defend their properties. The need to source fuel and welfare supplies to maintain protection is critical and the management of road blocks impedes the effectiveness of this being able to be achieved. Another side issue to this is identification cards, our association has been in discussions with WALGA and Department of Fire and Emergency Services and they are supportive of working with us to resolve this issue with us.
Livestock and companion animal management and welfare issues.

Comment: With the afore said, it was mentioned by many volunteers, the great work various community members did in taking care of and moving livestock around pre fire impact, during and after fire impact. This ranged from getting them out of the path of the fire, transport, veterinary services and feeding and watering of stock which is still continuing. In simple terms, this is community resilience in action and written processes and procedures of agencies are disconnected from community common sense principles that apply to those who understand the land and affect the ability of this to be fulfilled to its full potential as the community have to work around the bureaucracy.

2. Lessons learned from previous bushfire emergencies

(a) The extent to which the findings and recommendations of the following Western Australian bushfire reviews undertaken since 2011 have been implemented:

General comment: With all these reviews the volunteers association are at a distinct disadvantage. The departments are able to through people onto the tasks required and are fully supported by the agency as a whole with the recommendations being able to be influenced by the capacity of those who have the resources and backing. There have been recommendations of the past enquiries that the respective departments have not implemented which will be clear when this review investigates the recommendations. We have made comment in areas where volunteers have raised issues or expressed concerns.


Comment: recommendation 2 – Per the general comment above, the general view is that there is nothing wrong with the bush fires act in its current form. The current bush fire act was written by wise men who understood the rural community and to lose its intent or disempower community will be detrimental to the community.

Recommendation 6 - Needs to be revisited, local government have community development officers who are connected with their communities. This resource does not seem to have been recognised during this review. There are opportunities to move the funding and resources to the local level to re empower the community to develop local level programs that will give more targeted and connected messages and outcomes into the community.

Recommendation 10 - Needs to include the local volunteer bushfire brigades if they have the capacity to do so. By the department doing this in isolation creates disconnect at the community level especially in the rural communities and starts to affect community resilience.

Recommendation 11 - Is still a common issue that needs to be revisited. There is a perception of confusion between the messages going out in regards to bans and what can and can’t be done.

Recommendation 13 - It is noted that some funding has been released to parks and wildlife, however the level of direct funding to local governments needs to be addressed and supported.

Recommendation 14 - Still requires adequate resourcing and funding, the City of Wanneroo is a good example of what can be achieved at the local level.

Recommendation 15 - Is restrictive and needs to be open to all volunteers. The training packages and access to such training, needs to be addressed to enable local government volunteer’s to achieve the level they need to protect their communities.

Recommendation 21 - Requires more funding and resourcing to build capacity in this area.

Recommendation 23 - We are not clear as to any progress in this regard?

Recommendation 24 - We are not aware of any progress in this regard and would welcome feedback and the opportunity for volunteers to have equitable access to training?

Recommendation 26 - Volunteers continually share their frustration in regards to the amount of paperwork that has to be done now and the fact that when you are trying to combat a fire, your focus is on putting out the fire. There needs to be a balance in this regard. The common question is what does this achieve? What or who is it for? Is it to get ticks in the boxes to demonstrate process has been achieved, or is it just to make other people look good in the media? The true value and resource vs

capability vs outcome to suppress fire needs investigating? Legislation needs to be in place that ensures protection to those, whether paid or volunteer, who do their best under extreme duress and crisis management.

We have not encountered anyone that doesn’t go beyond the call of duty during emergencies to help others and this needs to be recognised. There have been strong views expressed that “trial by media” and “looking for someone to sack” or “hang out to dry” has to stop! This is having an impact on those willing to step up and give it a go and do their best for the community and is destroying the resilience and depth within all paid and volunteer organisations.

Recommendation 28 - The community capacity to respond with private fire units needs to be recognised and procedures and processes should not be restrictive of when there is fire the community coming together to put the fire out in the most effective and efficient means available. Concerns are continually being raised that very good low kilometer fire trucks are not being retained and/or available for local communities to purchase. Policy change enabling this will build capacity for when major events occur.

Recommendation 30 - This was exposed during the fires with the main highway bridge being burnt.

Recommendation 32 - The issue of bona fide resident access has not been adequately addressed as this was a major concern during the fires.

Recommendation 35 - Is still an ongoing issue with being able to access radios for bona fide volunteers and contractors. The capacity of people to respond efficiently and effectively is dependent on good communications. People working with local governments or who are contractors who support emergency operations on a regular basis should have access to the emergency network, to not do this is eroding community resilience and stopping people stepping forward and providing equipment and resources and in communities until recent times, for free.

Recommendation 41 - Needs to be addressed as this was an issue during the fires. Where practical to do so in high risk areas, infrastructure should be put underground or protected from fire.

Recommendation 46 - There is a view of a conflict of interest with the state emergency management committee being under Department of Fire and Emergency Services, we support the option to move the department under the department premier and cabinet to ensure there is clear separation and accountability. The current model is perceived as the state emergency management committee that set strategic state policy being subservient to a department, who’s head is a person that sets the policy for that department?? This perceptively implies an ability to influence policy so it would not be detrimental to a particular departments operations??

Recommendation 47 - We are not clear if there has been any resolution to this at this point in time.

Recommendation 48 - This is a very strong issue amongst volunteers and the local governments.

There is a perception that the rules are different for Department of Fire and Emergency Services who are now in control and distribution of the funding. There is a strong sense of conflict of interest that the body administering the levy is the main beneficiary of the level funding to which they receive? There needs to be clear separations and the rules revisited to ensure volunteers and local governments have access to funding to enable bushfire mitigation to occur and fairer access to equipment and resources funding. There is a need to revisit state policy that is allegedly preventing local businesses from being utilised to provide goods and services? This needs further investigation to ensure incentives and the stimulation of the local business communities.

Recommendation 52 & 53 - The issue of what is the best model has been raised in the context that the original intent has again been changed under the current command and control model. When discussing what the issues are for local government, it is clearly financial and resourcing. With the ESL being moved to an independent body, local governments should be entitled to seek ESL funding for dedicated roles and they being funded without any third party interference. That is the same rules that apply to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services apply to local government and parks and wildlife, who should also have access to funding for mitigation and suppression activities. This would assist with the stimulation of local employment and capacity building at the local level. Furthermore it would open the door for more community based collaboration between adjoining local governments.

Recommendation 54 - We express our strong disappointment that the volunteers have been sidelined with any opportunity to be at level 3 through the Department of Fire and Emergency Services system, which is perceptively viewed as being internal rank and career advancement based. Those who want to advance their skills have had to go externally or through park and wildlife who welcome volunteers into their IMT’s. Again because volunteer bushfire brigades, who are the biggest fire suppression
group, do not have a seat at the IBMC table, decision making is perceived as being bias towards the city based organisation.

**Recommendation 55** - This is something the enquirer will need to determine as to where or not this has been implemented?

The Report on the Post Incident Analysis of the 2011 Margaret River and Nannup bushfires had this to say about the complex inter-relationship between the different legislative instruments: “The legislative complexity reinforces the need for emergency management agencies to develop and maintain systems, policies and procedures that create the best conditions for optimal fire management outcomes and the efficient and effective use of finite fire management resources.” There is opportunity for the state to revisit its policies that restrict external opportunities in all areas of operations that would increase efficiencies and effectiveness of service delivery.

The report concludes at paragraph 1.3 to refer to the Margaret River PIA Lessons that included: “The most consistently identified issue within this capability area is the need for early, targeted and appropriate engagement with the local government authority, and the use of local expertise, to provide support to the Incident Management Team.” This demonstrates how the current models are failing and disempowering and disconnecting from volunteers and local communities, compared to our NSW counterparts who are integrated throughout the entire structure in a sincere and meaningful manner.

The report identified: “FESA has appointed additional Community Emergency Service Officer to improve relationships with local government and has established liaison positions during incidents to facilitate local volunteer engagement in incident management. FESA is continuing work in response to the Keelty Special Inquiries to enhance fire capability for bush fire brigades in larger town sites, along with initiatives to improve preparedness in the Perth Hills and Capes region. This will include exercising across local government, DEC and FESA, to embed the practice of engaging local expertise, in preparation for the 2012/13 bushfire season.” Whilst this sounds positive, a key point that affects local community resilience is empowerment and local control.

Appointing state based/controlled personnel traditionally reflects external and remote control and a clear disconnect with the local community. If the person in this role is put in a position that they have to make a decision between a local government position that suits the community needs or a Department of Fire and Emergency Services position based on a directive from head office, because the department controls the funding and the perceived consequence, the department view will prevail even if it is not in the communities interest. Why does the position need to go through the state? Is it all about control? Is it about giving more indirect resources to the state? There are views that this needs to be independently reviewed and the participating parties should have no connection to the current systems of operations to ensure true independence. The focus should be on how can we provide resources at the local level to address risk and build capacity.

The report continued to note: “There is, however, scope for further clarification of the opportunities for local engagement, including in state emergency management policy and to clarify that it can be valuable to engage with locally based agency staff.” The point is, why does it have to be agency staff? Locally employed staff through local government is more cost effective and provides the necessary community respect that supports resilience into the future. The state agency key focus should be liaison and support, not control.

Over the last 10 years volunteers have become increasingly concerned about the command and control approach of FESA and more so under the recent structure of Department of Fire and Emergency Services to fighting rural fires where local expertise is overlooked, and an increasing emphasis is placed on city based firefighters. Any proposed new legislation providing Department of Fire and Emergency Services with the total firefighting responsibility in rural areas will further

---

undermine the trust and respect of volunteers who often know their local patch better than any paid person external to the area.

Legislative amendment giving total power to Department of Fire and Emergency Services for rural fires will further undermine a coordinated approach to firefighting. It is a model that will not promote volunteer responses to rural fires where local knowledge and the collective and early response by farmers and community are imperative.

Reality of our situation with respect to bush fires demands an effort that creates and sustains a capable and well equipped pool of resources available for the biggest bush fire challenges; this is not a pool of permanent paid firefighters located in a central area, but of locally embedded sustainable and resilient volunteers. Rural fire suppression has traditionally been the domain of volunteers and it should continue to be. If there is a paid resource need at the local level, outside of the box ideas need to be explored with local government and the private sector to ensure the most efficient and effective models are considered to benefit the community.

Recent fire efforts have been paid fire fighters arriving at fire scenes without the required local knowledge who take a superior approach to fire fighting and apply methods and techniques from an urban environment which continues to cause tension.

(iii) Post-incident Analysis of the 2011 Margaret River and Nannup bushfires (Noetic Solutions, 2012)

**Comment:** This report like the others mainly focuses on two of the three fire agencies. There are clear themes throughout the documents relating to training, capacity and funding which need to be considered seriously if it is the government’s intent to address the community’s vulnerability of fire. What we must strongly represent is the lack of recognition of the local government bush fire brigades who play a key role in mitigation and prevention, suppression and in some cases the recovery activities. This holistic connection with community empowers and embraces community resilience and a sustainable culture into the future.

Again it is highlighted the number of suitably trained level 3 incident management team members, the current culture of a rank based system is and will continue to erode trust and respect given the difficulty for non-paid staff to access the courses require.

Effective access to maps continues to be a concern for volunteers on the ground. Concerns have been expressed that due to budget cut backs, emergency services directories have not been updated or areas that need this resource not being able to progress.

Perceptive views have been expressed that the introduction of the webeoc system is exclusive of volunteers and questions the relevance in the context that it doesn’t put out the fires? How do volunteers or other agencies get access? How many resources is this system taking to keep it up to date when resources are needed to assist with the suppression of the fire? Is there better and more efficient systems that could be utilised that could be incorporated into vehicle tracking and communications systems that would be more effective and efficient? The vehicle control point and there management continues to be an issue at all incidents and needs to be addressed to enable common sense to apply and flexibility in how it is managed.

(iv) Parkerville Stoneville Mt Helena Bushfire Review (State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC, 2014)

**Comment:** Key themes continue throughout this report that highlight and question are we improving or just following process? Bush fire mitigation, training, funding, communications, vehicle location/tracking and resourcing need to be to be addressed as pre previous comments.

12 Parkerville Stoneville Mt Helena Bushfire Review (State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC, 2014)
Comments in regards to the independent review and door knock undertaken highlights a common theme of how the agencies approach to communicating with the community is not reflective of how this particular community works. It clearly shows there was a poor response to the activity and the report reflects the survey was undertaken during office hour during the working week. This is the time when the community is way at work and hence the data demonstrating low participation.

(v) O’Sullivan and Lower Hotham Bushfires Review (SEMC, 2016)

Comment:- Volunteers expressed the view that this report did not truly explore all of what actually occurred at the incident and practices employed. Notable comments such as "Why was there fire vehicles parked up protecting Quindaning pub when the fire is 20kms away?” “Why were farmers and volunteers threatened by people in uniform that if they put a back burn in their property to give a wide fire break that they would be arrested and charged?” These practices have been previously employed with great success, yet under the new regime they can’t? Whilst we haven’t had the time or resource to further explore the issues we ask that the review looks at the whole picture and get a real understanding of who was really at the fire beside the state agencies and seek to interview contractors, community members including those affected to ensure the real picture is reflected. Bush fire mitigation, training, funding, communications, vehicle location/tracking and resourcing need to be to be addressed as pre previous comments, to name but a few.

(vi) The Western Australian State Emergency Management Committee Preparedness reports

Comment:- We have not had sufficient time to fully investigate this report and will endeavour to if time permits to put a supplementary comment in.

(b) The effectiveness of reforms implemented by the State since 2011 on the State’s ability to prevent, mitigate and respond to major bushfires and the community’s understanding of and preparedness for bushfire risk.

Comment:- The number and size of fires is increasing and more so in recent years. If there is no fuel there is no risk. For fires to be getting to the size they have been, would indicate that mitigation works is not being undertaken or has reduced since the Dwellingup fires in the early 1960’s. This is further highlighted in a chart seen in a bushfire front publication which clearly identifies that there has been a dramatic increase in fires which is a worrying trend that needs addressing.

Is a major contributing factor the disempowerment of volunteers and community at the local level and or the disparity of funding and resources allocations to local governments and community brigades? Has a fear or perceptive culture been created that is causing people to walk away and not want to be a part of their own safety prevention because they perceive there is too much bureaucracy in today’s

---

The necessary changes to improve our capacity to protect the community must begin with a clear AIIMS structure that has the authority, under emergency conditions, to over ride disparate agencies’ policies and procedures to ensure best possible operations.

The necessary changes must also create an independent system in which there is a singular focus on bush fires covering all aspects that include prevention, preparedness, response and recovery and include strong community volunteerism focus. It will restore the much clearer focus on bush fires holistically and get the required focus within agencies.

There is also a diffused focus on bush fires within the DFES structure whereby bush fires come to the attention of most areas of the department yet no single area has a clear responsibility for bush fire management. The department closed down the local government liaison branch and bush fire mitigation branch. The mitigation now seems to be getting some attention, at the cost of major fire impacts, with the requirement to undertake bushfire mapping as a consequence of the planning legislation changes. Bush fires are one of many emergency classifications that DFES have to prepare for and thus are not given the clear singular focus required.

---

15 AVBFB response to Department of Fire and Emergency Services proposed legislative change, page 5 section 1.1.3
The Association believes the most suitable mechanism for creating a singular system for bush fire management is the establishment of a Bush Fire/Rural Fire Service as an independent agency. A Bush Fire/Rural Fire Service can bring all the disparate bodies in the outer metro, per-urbans and rural communities, into a single, coherent structure for managing the bush fire risk to our communities. The organisational focus of a Bush Fire/Rural Fire Service will be at the local level to ensure local government and there communities are resourced, supported and empowered to the greatest extent possible to protect themselves and build resilience.

**Need for an independent structure**

It has been well established by previous reviews that our capacity to protect the community from the ravages of bush fires is hampered by the current centralised model. That structure creates its own problems and makes their resolution intractable under the current emergency services system. An insight into the problem with the multi authority system is gleamed from the following excerpt out of the DFES Major Incident Review of the Lower Hotham and O'Sullivan Fires, 2015.

“... difficult to plan how best to utilise resources, as there was no single record of the different circumstances, deployment durations and fatigue management policies for all resources from different agencies and volunteer associations.”

The same source informs us that the system is disjointed to an extent that authorities have trouble with the starting task of acting expeditiously and in concert to mobilise resources.

“Previous MIRs have recommended....
...that all agencies engaged in bushfire response should develop expeditious procedures for the mobilisation of resources in support of other agencies (Parkerville).

This recommendation was made in response to a finding of the Parkerville review that the system to mobilise resources from other Local Government areas is cumbersome and could cause delays in mobilising inter-agency support. The absence of an integrated inter-agency system to identify and coordinate resource deployments for the Lower Hotham and O'Sullivan incidents meant that this continued to be an issue. At the regional level, the ROC did not have a single system to identify and mobilise resources from Local Government or P&W.”

The repetition of phrases such as “single system” is common to reviews of the major bush fires in recent years and given this has been influenced by the departments resources capability to develop submissions that would support such a model, it is expected that this would be the outcome. This model is not in the interests of strong resilient communities.

It is a clear recognition of the problem inherent in our centralised control structure and its very real adverse effect on our state’s capacity to protect the community from bush fires.

The overt need for a separate single chain of command has been veiled for some years by reports of progress toward greater interagency integration. There needs to clear understanding of the difference between a “Command and Control” model verses a community based “Trust and Respect” model.

Reports of such progress belie the reality that in very critical matters, progress has been unacceptably slow and some problems are not going to be resolved through voluntary actions by relevant authorities.

Despite assurances over a number of years that there is progress on this front, the recent SEMC report into the 2015 fires highlights the lack of progress on even basic matters.

“A common understanding of implementation of AIIMS should be agreed upon ... Inherently inefficient departures from AIIMS, such as more than one logistics unit, should be addressed immediately, and any residual differences in approach between agencies should be made explicit.”
“DPAW and DFES to agree on the role and function of an Incident Controller ... and even on minimum duration that IC serves at an incident.” In regards to this point, the report as with the other reports, fails to recognise the existence of the bushfire services within local government and there expertise and ability to be a part of the decision making process. This is degrading and further demonstrates disconnect between that state agency and the largest fire fighting resource of the state. This further fuels the perception that volunteers and community are not valued.

Problems with the current system are further acknowledged in the same report as being:

- ineffective, inconsistent and confusing communication between agencies and with the community;
- agencies follow different procedures in declaring incident levels and issuing community warnings;
- staff capability variations due to different quantity and quality training;
- trust deficit between parts of agencies.

Another example of what further brings perception and fear is when comments made by the commissioner in Hansard, 25th June 2015, pages 3 and 4 in relation to disciplining volunteers and changing legislation, clearly demonstrates the commanding intent to demand control. This behaviour is contrary to community volunteerism and demonstrates the lack of respect for volunteers. Volunteers don’t respond well to intimidatory behaviours, respect is something you earn not something you command!

Other matters can be found in past reports and do not require further repetition to make the point that a separate unified system under a single structure is required.

The problems identified through previous incidents are an indictment of the fundamental flaws in our system at present.

The problems are rooted in the current system, including the fact that the two key government agencies have different purposes, methods and cultures not amenable to readily being brought together into a single unified system.

“DFES is primarily an emergency services agency. It manages emergencies, including developing the capability of its workforce to respond to emergencies and supporting communities to prevent and mitigate hazard risks.

The role of P&W is quite different. It is a land management agency, primarily concerned with protecting and conserving the state’s natural environment. Fire management is only one aspect of its land management responsibilities, including prescribed burning, working with the community to ensure bushfire preparedness, and responding to fires on P&W-managed land.”

(From page 61, DFES Major Incident Review of the Lower Hotham and O’Sullivan Fires, 2015)

This further highlights the cultural differences between Department of Fire and Emergency Services which works on command and control model bound by rules processes and procedures, and parks and wildlife who work with community and has fully integrated volunteerism into all their activities on a trust and respect model as volunteers are a critical part of their business.

An emergency situation demands a singular chain of command operating with a single set of rules for all those under their management. People engaged in an emergency situation must have clear lines of responsibility and communication to maximise operational efficiency and safety of all involved.

In a high pressure, limited resources situation, management teams must have the benefit of common rules for all to maximise resource effectiveness and hence our support for the AIIMS system to which local government bush fire brigades were one of the first to adopt in WA.
To achieve it in reasonable time requires a single structure that can make decisions that have not been made by agencies in a voluntary manner.

The most effective way to achieve the necessary outcome is for an independent Bush Fire/Rural Fire Service body with the power to manage agencies into taking the required steps similar to that of the NSW rural fire service.

**How long can we wait for agency collaboration?**

Despite many reviews over a number of years stating the same position on the need for a more unified system for tackling bush fires, and albeit progress in some aspects has been noted, overall progress has been slow in achieving such an outcome through voluntary collaboration between agencies.

“There were many examples of DFES and DP&W working well together, particularly where relationships were already established. DFES and P&W personnel commented that inter-agency relationships have improved over recent years. However, differences in the agencies’ culture, expertise and approaches constrained collaboration in some instances. Less than optimal collaboration sometimes impacted the effectiveness of the response to the incidents. It is difficult for organisations to find the optimal point of collaboration, but there are some positive examples that DFES and P&W can draw on.”

“WA does not have an integrated multi agency resource management system. There is no integrated way of identifying and tracking resources .... As a consequence, resource deployments were not always optimal and personnel on the fire ground were sometimes put at risk.”

(From page 56, DFES Major Incident Review of the Lower Hotham and O’Sullivan Fires, 2015)

It is unlikely that the overall aim will be achieved under current arrangements. Some of the problems in bringing about the desired level of inter-agency collaboration, inter-operability and co-ordination appear to be intractable under the current authority system.

This was effectively acknowledged in the SEMC report on the 2015 fires:

“Some improvements proposed by previous reviews are inherently difficult to achieve, not least because they require the participation and co-operation of parties other than the two principal state fire combat agencies.”

“Complex issue of organisational remit and culture have also to be confronted.”

The reality is that the two main government agencies admit that they are incapable of creating the system that will maximise our capacity to protect communities from bush fires. The involvement of local government adds to the complexity but should not be used as a scape goat for failure by the two government agencies, rather than seeing this as an opportunity to empower them at the local level and deal with the issues at hand.

Attempting to bring the two agencies together through the Interagency Bushfire Management Committee will not work as the Committee has no ultimate authority to impose requirements on the agencies. It is also noted that the largest agency that provides the state with approximately 80% of it bushfire resources, Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades via their association do not have any representation on that committee, so there is no “buy in” with the decision making process.

Overcoming these problems can only be achieved by a single bush fire command structure such as a Rural Fire Service authorised to enforce requirements upon agencies for the greater public interest and thus over ride sectional interests that are impeding our current bush fire management capacity. This requires action at the political level by the government and Parliament, action that has not been taken up to now to the detriment of our bush fire management capacity.
Community safety demands that such action is taken immediately rather than allow our bush fire fighting capacity to continue to be diminished in favour of organisational industrially controlled interests.

**Prescribed burning effort must increase and be sustained**

Prescribed burning is an essential element of bush fire mitigation and risk management. The need for large scale prescribed burning on an annual basis was establish long ago and has been duly acknowledged in all prior reports. There was a period post Dwellingup fires that great work was undertaken in this space resulting in a decrease in large fires. As the prescribe burning reduced as a consequence of funding and resource cuts the number and size of fires have increased.

The benefits of prescribed burning in fighting a large bush fire are acknowledged in reports, including the most recent DFES MIR into the 2015 fires. The report noted that the fire went into the Hakea forest where prescribed burning had taken place three years ago and that the fire stalled in that area. Conversely, the bush fire breakout escalated quickly through unburnt fuel areas that had not been burnt for more than 20 years.

It is acknowledged within the DFES MIR report that:

"Fuel loads are a key determinant on the incidence and intensity of bush fires."
"Prescribed burning is the most effective preventative measure to manage loads and mitigate bush fire impact."
"Prescribed burning is recognised as an effective method to manage fuel loads and reduce the size and intensity of bush fires."
"The benefit of young fuel loads is clearly evident in the O'Sullivan fire. The southern front of the fire was stopped in its track when it reached the 3 year old fuel loads of the 2012 Boddington fire scar."

Despite the wide spread recognition of the necessity for prescribed burning, our efforts have been on a downward trend since the 1970s. The annual prescribed burning effort is approximately half of what was done until the 1980s and half of what is required.

The point is adequately illustrated by a graph on page 17 of the DFES MIR into the 2015 fires. It shows the annual prescribed burning effort has roughly halved since the 1970s, a situation that is likely to be contributing to the large scale of bush fires experienced in recent years.

The graph shows that annual burning averaged around 300,000 hectares through the 1960s and 1970s. This period followed the Royal Commission into the 1961 Dwellingup fire that was strong on the need for prescribed burning. The decline in effort begins in the 1980s with the annual burning falling to roughly 200,000 ha by the 1990s and continuing to fall further since then to around 150,000 ha on average since 2000.

This state of affairs is not acceptable as it produces an unnecessarily higher level of bush fire risk for our communities. DPAW is the key state agency with responsibility for prescribed burning in our vast state forest and other conservation areas.

It has a poor record over recent years with respect to meeting its annual prescribed burning target, a target that is already too low which could be contributed to the decrease in resources and funding over the years.

In 2013-14, it undertook this task on less than 80,000 ha and was pleased to report that last year, in 2014-15, it had almost doubled the effort to nearly 150,000 ha. This performance is not good enough and cannot be allowed to continue and needs to be resourced appropriately. DPAW’s regular failure to meet its annual targets has seen an announcement made by government to inject funding from royalties for regions this year to see if this trend can be reversed?

DPAW’s prescribed burning must be made accountable by way of reporting to a higher authority that will ensure that targets are met, or very close to it, and that funding is spent on that task. There is
opportunity for government to revisit their policies to ensure that other measures can be utilised outside of traditional internal management systems to boost capacity to get more resources of the ground. This principle could also be used in the suppression area which would also boost capacity.

Such an authority could be a Rural Fire Service that could monitor and direct DPAW’s effort to ensure this critical task is undertaken properly every year to maximise community protection.

**IMTs – insufficient resources and local participation**

Problems with Incident Management Teams have been established in prior reviews and further restated in the recent reports into the Lower Hotham and O’Sullivan fires.

It is most unlikely that all the problems recognised in those reports had been overcome by the time of the Waroona fires.

The DFES MIR 2015 Fires report states clearly and alarmingly that with respect to managing the firefighting effort that:

> “Ultimately, the state did not have sufficient resourcing to manage two large concurrent fires.”

This is recognition of a very critical problem that already exists. Warnings of hotter and longer summers in the future, creating longer and more dangerous bush fire seasons, means our resources may be stretched even further. This is supported by the constant complaints from local government personnel and bush fire volunteers that they are not given equal opportunity to obtain the training required to support this void in the system.

As previously stated they is also opportunity for the state to step outside the box and look at other opportunities that exist to build capacity in the response area across the state in partnership with local government and the private sector.

The DFES report states that the O’Sullivan fire was managed better and operations were run more efficiently due to the full IMT contingent that was in place. By contrast, management of the Lower Hotham fire was less effective and encountered various problems due to insufficient resourcing of that IMT with personnel numbers at less than half of what was operating at the O’Sullivan fire. Is this due to the current “rank based approach” rather that the capable and competent community up model?

The inadequate resourcing of the Lower Hotham IMT meant that problems were encountered in many aspects including co-ordination of the response, managing the response in a reactive manner as there was not enough resourcing to undertake forward planning, poor management of crews and resources contributing to a negative experience buy those involved in that fire fight, including the volunteers.

This situation also meant that BFBs were operating on a semi-independent basis, taking the initiative in the absence of direction from IMT. The situation also created communication problems between crews and IMT, as well as IMT communication up the chain of command.

Other problems encountered due to the under resourced IMT included volunteers arriving without command being aware of their presence, crews waiting for hours for briefings, sector commanders unaware of all deployed crews, and volunteers having to manage their own logistics, including catering. Nonetheless, all those in the Lower Hotham IMT should be applauded for doing their best and ultimately managing the operations well with limited resources.

The report also noted:

> “As has been acknowledged in previous reviews of major fires, it is critical that key local personnel are involved within the IMT for the duration of the incident.”

Local knowledge can make a significant difference and thus must be embedded in IMTs in a genuine, functional leadership role. Local personnel, both career and volunteers, must get access to training including participation in multi-agency IMT exercises.
To ensure we have a sufficient pool of personnel prepared for IMT roles, and to include local personnel in the IMTs, we have to increase the pool of trained personnel amongst volunteer, career, local government and private sector to ensure we can manage multiple large fires if that case should arise.

Agencies have focussed largely on their own internal resources which has left the state short of resources overall. A Rural Fire Service will have the wider focus to ensure that resource planning looks at the outcome for the state, not just for individual agencies.

**Harmonising personnel rules for emergency situations**

Another source of operational inefficiency and an impediment to improving our fire fighting capacity is the divergence in human resource management rules amongst the various employer groups involved. IMTs face significant challenges in managing the fire fight to which is added the complexity of having to incorporate different HR requirements amongst the crews and even the IMT itself. Harmonising rules around the management of people fighting a major bush fire will make the overall management task less cumbersome and create operational efficiencies.

We cannot allow the situation to continue whereby personnel in a fire fight, even within IMTs, are compelled off the job because they work under different shift rules to their peers, even where the individuals are willing to adopt their peer’s standards and stay on a shift longer.

People who happen to be union members, including their representatives, understand the bush fire risk like anyone else. They understand that the urgent need to protect communities in emergency situations, where lives and property are at risk, must over ride rules that work well at other times but are an impediment in times of an emergency.

The Association is confident that unions covering people in the emergency services sector will do their best in helping create the best bush fire fighting capacity we can build together as a community. A new Rural Fire Service, without any entrenched interests or past legacies, can develop a unified system delivering a more efficient, unified personnel management system to apply under emergency circumstances.

**Emergency effort contingency and recovery fund**

An emergency situation is a time of great risk to people or property. It is time when great effort is dedicated by emergency service personnel to protecting those at risk be it an individual in danger or a whole region with multiple communities threatened by raging bush fires.

Emergency situations like a large bush fire do not require “on site bean counters” to inject financial implications into our firefighting effort. The task is to throw whatever resources are available to defeat the fire and protect the community; sadly in recent years this philosophy has been lost and could be a contributing factor to why we are getting larger fires and also why the restoration of damage done in the fire suppression effort is not being reinstated as traditionally has been the case. The Waroona shire oval is a recent example of this.

Financial considerations cannot be permitted to hinder a firefighting effort. There is a need to review state policies around the access to the wildfire account by local governments and rules that have been causing unnecessary duress which is resulting in the community resilience being eroded at the local level. The cost of damage from an out of control fire will always be far greater to the government directly, as well as to the affected communities, than the cost of a fire fight.

In order to avoid the bureaucratic trap of inaction for fear of a budget blow out, in a situation where no such fear should ever exist, government should have an Emergency Contingency Fund of $30 million to cover the added costs due to an emergency situation and assist the local governments in any restoration works as a consequence of the fire and to assist in the recovery phases with activities that
are not supported by any other grant systems. This is and continues to be an issue that the community needs support with.

Such a fund would provide assurance for all involved in an emergency that people managing the situation are providing whatever resources are needed without any denial of resources driven by financial considerations.

It is likely that only a small portion would be used in any year meaning. The annual topping up of the fund would become part of ordinary costs after the government allocates the initial sum.

**Going in harder, earlier with a single command structure**

The establishment of a contingency fund would make it clear that government and the community expect management to tackle fires harder earlier to minimise the risk of small fires turning into major catastrophic events such as those we have seen.

Currently the practice is to fight fires with a managed effort until such time as the fires require greater effort and are escalated to the next tier of emergency. There is a perception that our firefighting efforts are even hampered by internal agency deliberations over what level of fire emergency should be declared in a situation.

Our collective aim should be to minimise, if not eliminate major bush fires that emerge from smaller fires that are tackled for an extended period by limited resources. Under the single management of a Rural Fire Service, incidents will be reported up the chain of command immediately and updates provided frequently. Fires that are not contained and controlled in a short time frame will be tackled with an increased level of holistic community resources and effort more quickly thus minimising the risk of a minor fire turning into a major fire with devastating consequences for the community. There is an opportunity to rebuild the community resilience model that worked effectively and efficiently in the past that embraced the whole of community.

It may well be argued that the Waroona fires could have been contained to a smaller scale with either more prescribed burning or a greater response undertaken more urgently. Whilst those points may be seen as debatable by some, it is surely clear that the current system of allowing a fire to be fought with limited resources until it is out of control cannot be allowed to continue.

It will continue if we persevere with the current centralised system for managing bush fires and again underline the need for a consolidated system under a Bush Fire/Rural Fire Service structure.

**Facilitating better volunteer representation**

DFES, DPAW and Local Government make a good effort to engage with volunteers. However, due to the official links between those governmental authorities and volunteers, there are aspects to their relationship that require an intermediate representative body to ensure the interests of the volunteers is protected.

The Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades has undertaken that role for 30 years. The reforms that have impacted emergency services over the recent past, including BFBs, have resulted in significantly greater demands on the Association as a partner in the state’s emergency services network and a representative body for volunteers.

The very modest government support for the Association puts a severe limitation on our capacity to meet all demands thoroughly. The continuing process of reform and greater volunteer engagement will stretch the Association’s capacity even thinner under current levels of support. The government and its agencies place high demands and expectations on the Association, they duly note the importance of volunteer engagement through representative bodies such as the AVBFB yet their financial support for the Association invites doubt over their position vis a vis the Association.
It has been a routine matter for several decades for governments to provide reasonable funding to community groups to undertake representative roles in almost every area of activity with a government linkage. Funding for such organisations is generally commensurate with the level of importance given to their sector by governments and their agencies. Funding would also be expected to reflect to some extent the task they are undertaking for the benefit of their sector and the community at large, including the government.

The current level of support for the Association, equivalent to funding one part time mid tier government employee and modest overheads, without an office space, does not by any measure reflect reasonable support for an organisation representing an estimated 26,000 volunteers in more than 560 brigades spread across the vast distances of our state in a sphere as critical as emergency services.

The government’s stated support for volunteer BFBs and respect for their contribution needs to be demonstrated by increased support for their representative body, the AVFBF. The increased support should be agreed to and provided immediately thus allowing the Association to initiate its own processes to establish a new structure with an improved representative capacity.

The Association envisages that a minimum of four times the amount of the currently inadequate annual funding would be the minimal amount that would constitute a respectful level of support. This would enable the Association to employ much needed additional staff, establish a suitable office and meeting space, increase membership engagement through more regional visits and Association supported activities, and improve our contribution as a stake holder in the emergency services sector.

**Conclusion**

There is an immediate need for clear reform and issues raised throughout this report need to be given very serious consideration to halt a concerning trend in the volunteer and community resilience fields that will have a major impact on the triple bottom line principles of all tiers of government into the future. The following key recommendations should be given priority in conjunction with the other issues raised in this document.

We recommend that the ESL funds are managed by an independent body or a board that has equal representation from all those who benefit from it. That the funding rules be expanded to enable local governments to have access for the full prevention preparedness response and recovery elements. That strategic planning and five year vehicle and equipment program plans be developed by local governments at the local level to ensure community risk and capacity is addressed and this is used as the basis of the state risk profile.

The creation of a separate Western Australian Local Government Rural Fire Service (RFS), preserving the Bush Fire Brigades history and image, and responsible for all fire management in rural and peri-urban areas where bush fire brigades currently prevail. This body is managed by a board of management and chief executive officer that has a community volunteer background and an understanding of community resilience with a holistic approach to emergency management prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

That adequate funding and resources be redirected from the ESL to enable the body to develop fit for purpose vehicles and equipment in a meaningful and engaging consulting manner with bushfire volunteers and tailor training to suit the end user in the field along with all necessary support services at the local level in partnership with local government.

The aim of the RFS will be firstly, as far as possible, to prevent large, damaging bushfires on private land and secondly to provide a cost effective and efficient fire fighting service in rural areas that works in liaison with Local Governments and builds local capacity who’s values are built and based on trust and respect with their key role being liaison and support to volunteers, local governments and their communities.
Key responsibilities of the RFS will be to ensure the responsible management of land vested in various government agencies.

Government must ensure that changes to the Bush Fires Act currently being contemplated do not proceed and separate acts be retained to ensure that services are not compromised or complicated. That any amendments to the bushfires act, are reflective of the key focus areas of the new body and enable the service to attend and deal with any community emergency and risks identified through the local emergency management process. The need for a quick and effective resolution of the crisis in an emergency, in particular the creation of a Rural Fire Service needs to be upheld.

Government must provide sufficient financial and resource assistance to DPaW to enable them to meet an annual fuel reduction target of about 250,000 ha. This will require more permanent field staff and resources across the state.

That state policies be reviewed with the wesplan fire being split to rural and urban fire. Policies around emergency expenditure are review. Procurement and operational policies be reviewed that embrace outside the box innovation and resilient with a whole of community approach to all business areas.

The state policies are changed to re-empower local communities and resilience and develop state capacity in partnership with local government and the private sector.

That a funding and resources grant be allocated to the association of volunteer bushfire brigades wa/inc to enable the development of identification and benefits card in consultation with WALGA and Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

That grant funding support for the association of volunteer bushfire brigades wa/inc to increase capacity to represent the volunteers of Western Australia be increased by four times the current amount.

The association will work with government through this process to develop a community based, volunteer culture model that embraces sustainable volunteerism into the future.