

2.

The following documents will be supported by evidence in a supplementary submission which should remain confidential to prevent humiliation to the parties involved.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to the committee and supply my history of fire fighting and my association with the Agricultural industry.

I first joined the Rural Fire brigade in Warringah in 1965 and attended every major fire in NSW & Victoria until 1982.

Upon leaving Sydney as a real estate refuge I moved to Cairns where I became inducted into the State Emergency Service and after two years I became the Cairns Mulgrave SES Controller.

After purchasing agricultural land near Rockhampton I set up home and joined the Rural Fire Brigade in 1991. I completed numerous training courses being Certified to Incident Controller and held the brigade BTSO position (Brigade Training Support Officer)

During my residency in Rockhampton I studied for a diploma in Engineering Technology where I became the first of four person team to score 100 percent in the University. My thesis scored a High Distinction with 98 %. I still work as a volunteer assisting students in Laboratory projects today at CQU.

Over my life time I gained numerous certificates in engineering & electronics:

Fitter Machinist/toolmaker
Diploma in electronics
Armature radio operator
Heavy Combination Drivers Licence
16 Machinery tickets for earth moving machinery
Cranes, all types.
Dogger
Rigger
Scaffolding
Workplace trainer & assessor.

While living in Sydney I qualified as a tree surgeon.

The above is a short description of my qualifications and I firmly believe I have a responsibility to pass on my knowledge to the young people who follow me.

To progress I would like to follow the 5 terms on reference.

1. Past and current practices of land and vegetation management by the agricultural sector and regional industries:

With 25 years living in a rural area I have witnessed numerous government attempts to control vegetation and land clearing. Although I consider myself as a responsible conservationist some legislation hindered primary production severely by reducing areas for cattle pasture. This led land owners to a blatant refusal to comply and I can assure you that most of the land owners had very good intentions in regards to land management and vegetation control.

One must be aware of the ongoing cost for carrying out an agricultural business let alone the set up costs. Just connecting to the power grid can cost between 15 to 40 thousand dollars. If in the cattle industry there are nils tags and freight to the market. Council rates are a major cost of around \$1.50 per acre making landowners acquire high heard numbers which can force them to over grazing.

Not a great deal has changed with regulations and most land owners carry on their land management programs to there planned program. Over the years I have always asked the old men of the industry for advice on activities on my property. I believe the older primary producers are the best land managers.

2. The science behind activities such as back burning, clearing and rehabilitation:

Since my first introduction to Rural Fire Fighting in 1965 I quickly realized water was not the best option for fighting wild fires. The Warringah Shire near Sydney had severe fires most years travelling very fast. Most fire fighting was carried out using a drip torch fighting fire with fire. The tankers were mainly used to protect structural threats and mopping up. It was without question fire fighters expected home owners to clear at least around their homes to assist us to quench major fires. Most home owners expected us to protect their homes and on the odd occasion we were abused for not being there.

3. The economic impact of vegetation and land management policies, regulations and restrictions:

The current land clearing regulations force a burden on private land owners to refrain from day to day small scale clearing of paddocks due to the risk of prosecution by government agencies generating money to further their employment.

The major factor of land management stress is centred around water access by using river water or enduring the cost of constructing a dam. I am confused in regards to pumping from a river where the cost of a licence is extreme. This government fraud further adds to financial stress and contravenes section 100 of the Australian constitution with state government approves legislation which contravenes section 109 of the same constitution. In past major fires I have stood in mud up to my waist trying to extract the last vestige of water to fight a wild fire.

4. The impact of severe fires on the agricultural landscape, agricultural production and industry in regional, rural and remote areas:

The above subject is a very sensitive question and it is my experience most industry landowners experience very little problems with severe fire due to using dozers to clear fire breaks around their homes. The only real concerns are stock losses and cattle feed to maintain their animals. On the odd occasion fence damage can be expensive and time consuming. In regards to the hobby farmer the losses can be catastrophic due to fire condition. Most land owners having large acreages possess earth moving machinery which is frequently used to clear fuel build up from fallen trees & weed pests. The most severe impact is depression build up leading to leaving them to leave the industry & in some cases suicide.

5. Factors that contribute to fire risk in regional, rural and remote areas:

The regulations governing fire hazard reduction reduces the process being carried out for fear of prosecution if the fire escalates out of control with an unexpected weather event. This practise of hazard reduction appears very ineffective due to the burn of is usually carried out in winter months which charges the ground with nitrogen & potash allowing regrowth to develop and cure in the event of wild fire in summer.

In regards to crown land large pockets remain heavily dense which is the main starting point of a fire.

One must be aware that even green grass & trees are potential fuel for wild fire and can be dried out by the fire heat radiation prior to fire front impact. This I have experienced on numerous occasions.

6. The role the agricultural sector has in working with emergency services and forestry management officials in managing fire risk.

In the past I have found that the forestry field officers are very reasonable and knowledgeable people to work with when fighting fires. The main difficulty is the cooperation with mother nature who always does not fit the experts computer model of the fire type. Over the past 200 years the human race has failed miserably in improving fire fighting methods and understanding fire potential.

In regards to fire command the local RFS seniors are overridden by urban experts in structural fires. On many occasions I have witnessed refusal to accept input from local RFS members who know the area by urban incident controllers.

Conclusion:

It is my opinion that the emergency services in Australia have learnt nothing from past disasters and are incapable of improving fire fighting methods. Being reluctant to try or develop new methods of fire fighting due to the fact that if the fires were quickly reduced numerous full time employees would be out of a job, not to mention the bureaucrats making a living in this occupation. I find the evacuation order to remove 8000 people from a town ridiculous when the trucks on the fire front could not find a fire threat.

If you watch the video footage of the Canberra fires you will notice that the reason so many houses were destroyed was that the fire had stopped and the ember attack

5.

impacting unattended houses did the damage with to little numbers of fire fighting vehicles on the ground.

Consider the cost of all the royal commissions carried out in Australia at great cost to the taxpayer if that money was directed into building up an air borne strike force of appliances better results would be achieved on the fire ground. Each state establishes its own RFS on the belief that the fire risk is different but that is unrealistic from actual reality. Fuel is fuel and given the ideal weather conditions disaster occurs. As a crew member of the Australian Coastal Surveillance Centre in Cairns I witnessed numerous major wild fires on Cape York Peninsula confirming to me that no state is risk free. It is fact that 93% of Queensland area has little or no fire protection.

My final recommendation would be that the committee watch Utube footage of the FFV09 tracked fire fighting vehicle which could change the success rate of fire suppression due to its ability to actually chase fires in rough terrain.

I would be only to happy to present this submission to the committee in person and answer any questions arising from my comments.

The most important issue to be considered is that the RFS be federalised with one standard and one chain of command.

Attached are copies of a submission supplied to the Malone review in 2013.

Always Australian



Larry Coleman

