

Nairn
21 August 03

15 August 2003

Mr Gary Nairn, MP
Chairman
House Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Nairn

Given our briefing of the House Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires, the Australian Spatial Information Business Association (ASIBA) has been interested in the results of the McLeod Inquiry in the ACT.

ASIBA notes the number of references within the McLeod Report to the poor state of mapping in the ACT and surrounding areas. The following comments, taken from the McLeod Report, indicate a belated appreciation of the importance of spatial data and mapping products in the management of bushfires and other critical incidents.

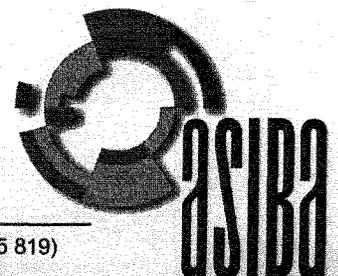
Mapping and information systems

Firefighters and fire managers need good mapping products. Police and supporting agencies also rely on up-to-date maps. The Inquiry was told on a number of occasions that mapping products were inadequate during the response to the January fires. Examples are:

- *local crews relying on a 1:100000 map of the ACT when responding to a fire—such a large scale map making detail difficult to identify*
- *incoming local and interstate fire crews receiving photocopies of out-of-date maps*
- *inadequate resources for updating and producing current maps for incident management teams.*

The Inquiry notes the ESB recommendation for improved 'spatial analysis capacity', but it considers that having mapping products suitable for everyday use is absolutely essential and that ESB should focus on achieving that goal first.

Obtaining the necessary data centrally, from within the Department of Urban Services, is also important; so that consistent data are used and kept up to date. The large number of volunteers in the ACT Bushfire Service and ACT Emergency Services gives the Department an excellent opportunity to gain additional detailed feedback on the naming of local roads and other features often referred to during emergencies.



Reliance on the Department's capacity to produce the maps offers the further potential to present the data in a form that can subsequently be used in data transmission once the new ESB communications network is in operation.

The Inquiry noted ESB's recommendation in its submission to significantly develop in-house geographical information system capabilities. Although the Inquiry did not specifically review this aspect, it noted that capabilities already exist in the ACT Government and that any additional capability developed in ESB should not duplicate existing resources. The Inquiry understands that ESB will need to develop additional specific data sets to maximise capabilities with future computer-aided dispatch systems and communication networks.¹

The comments above are consistent with those made by ASIBA in its briefing to your Committee. It is also a clear indication of the existence of problems associated with the silo system of data acquisition. Unfortunately, the McLeod Report fails to mention the critical issues of data standards and interoperability.

There are a number of other areas of the Report where reference is made to spatial data shortcomings. Unfortunately, and perhaps because the terms of reference were not broad enough, the Report made no mention of the need for spatial information to manage the on-going rehabilitation and rebuilding processes.

ASIBA is grateful for the opportunity your Committee afforded it to describe the importance of spatial data and technologies to the prevention, management and rehabilitation of critical incidents. I reaffirm our offer to assist the Parliamentary Committee should it wish further information or clarification – particularly following the outcomes of the McLeod Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



David Hocking
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires in the ACT, R. McLeod AM, 1 August 2003 (Pages 96-97)