

1.2 Preparation and planning

Limited

1.3 Response to bushfires

In my opinion there should have been more resources thrown at the fire before it became massive, after that Fire Fighters did the best they could with sometimes chaotic directions and information

1.4 Any other matters

I would like to see the RFS understand how to deploy and work with Volunteers, become more efficient and better functioning (see attached file)

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- Green Wattle Creek Fire Submission.doc

When fire broke out on the southern flank about Wanganderry, National Parks Officer [REDACTED] was assigned the task to co-ordinate activities with this fire. The Group Captains in the RFS who operated in this area were not present. When [REDACTED] had a day off, [REDACTED] ([REDACTED] Captain) was handed the reins, it was up to [REDACTED] to run the logistics with 30 odd appliances and personnel, this was unfair and an impost on [REDACTED]. He did a good job as he knows the country really well as he spends most of his time on it (self employed supplying firewood). His expertise is on the ground directing front line personnel.

Because our RFS managers do not know the country and really only saw it from Satellite imagery or helicopter they were instructing burns to be put in Gullies that never see light and are always damp, other areas where the way the winds and terrain work would have been disastrous. There needs to be more collaboration between groups, there seems to be a push now to go away from large paper maps and topographical maps in favour of electronic screen driven images, these can be sometimes misleading because of the limited scope of the image and there is still a need for the bigger picture especially when doing reconnaissance work.

There appears to be a blame game going on, starting with the fires and continuing to this day. For example, a back burn was put in around Colo Vale which made it's way south west. The Brigades on the western side were instructed to light up the area that the blaze was heading for so they would be responsible for the outcome. As it turned out, the fires met on a ridge, which was there first? The crews on the western side of Mt Waratah were able to stop the fire going further to the south east threatening Mittagong and Bowral. There are several other events unfolding in the community which seem to be based on some personal likes and dislikes or shifting responsibility for incidents to the lowest level and not what will be best for the community and environment for the future.

When I as a volunteer contact Fire Control I am generally treated as a problem and need to have the rules thrown at me, I really have a very limited number of staff to contact who listens, understands and either explains the reason for an issue or attempts to rectify the problem.

RFS as a volunteer organisation is full of members whose primary interest is their own community and country. The organisations' management seem to be more urban based and interested in career and self. The volunteers generally work well together with neighbouring brigades as our farms overlap some areas and we work and socialise. We are often contractors or self employed and therefore have a professional interconnect, this allows us to know one-another's strengths and we can use these talents when fighting fires, it works very well for us. Our Brigades are small and based in the rural landscape, when a fire breaks out in the area, we treat it personally, it's our land, our bush, we want to protect it. We are fairly autonomous and self reliant, we do not need or seek out constant involvement with Fire Control. We are competent Fire Fighters and get the jobs done efficiently, Fire Control seem to see this as a problem?

There is an opportunity to improve communications when incidents break out. As the RFS management becomes more centralised we are loosing the local knowledge base of where incidents are occurring and who should respond to them. Just as the hierarchical approach to Fire Ground Comms control has been improved, maybe a similar system could be deployed for call outs and general communications. We need people in Fire Control who know the Brigades, know the area they cover and know the geography and road networks of those local areas. It is not something you do by looking at a map.

Working with Fire and Rescue was interesting, while their expertise is not in question their legislative attitude is sometime difficult to work with. Only on one occasion did a Fire and Rescue leader come and ask our Deputy Captain who was running an incident at the back of Hill Top, what he could do to help? They then worked with us. On the other hand we were on our truck in the same vicinity as a Fire and Rescue crew, things had settled down and we were stood down and were asked to let the other crews know. Our Crew leader approached the Fire and Rescue team to let them know they could stand down, he was told he had no authority over them and they would only stand down when instructed by their management! On hearing this we hoped they had to spend the night there doing nothing! They were stood down by their management.

The deployment of heavy machinery was chaotic, the operators were pushed from pillar to post, go here, there, back to here. Really Fire Control did not have the appropriate staff or number of staff to co-ordinate these resources. Finally Management appointed a Plant and Equipment Manager and the operator we were with was left in a quandary as he was told he wasn't needed and then he was. Eventually he put in a crucial piece of infrastructure (new fire trail on the northern side of the power lines on [REDACTED] Road) which will serve us well into the future, at all times being sympathetic to the environment and terrain. We saw other operators who do not normally work in the bush simply bludgeon their way through an area or rip up boundary access roads that were needed for property protection.

In Summary

There is a massive disconnect between RFS Management and Volunteers, the volunteers are the ones who know their country and how to defend it, the Management are logistic managers and dictatorial in their approach, they seek to use the volunteers advice and then treat them like pawns on a Chess Board, it felt like they would rather use Fire and Rescue than volunteers as they would do what they were told, be it right or wrong!

The section of fire we controlled went very well, we were lucky, we had [REDACTED] and very knowledgeable volunteers. Fire Control don't respect or utilise their Brigades personnel knowledge and therefore do not know who to place where or when in an emergency situation.