



17 April 2020

Mr Dave Owens APM & Professor Mary O'Kane AC  
NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Via email: [inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au](mailto:inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Owens & Prof O'Kane

I am pleased to provide a submission to your Inquiry into the recent bushfires in NSW on behalf of the NSW Rural Fire Service Association.

I would welcome an opportunity to meet with you, or otherwise enter into discussions, in relation to the content of this submission and the broader work of your Inquiry.

Should the Association be able to assist your Inquiry in any way, we would be more than willing to do so.

Yours sincerely

**Brian McDonough**  
President



## Introduction

The fire season of 2019/20 will long be remembered for the extraordinary destruction of country, loss of property and loss of life. It was a fire season unlike any that has previously been experienced across vast areas of our state, and indeed the nation.

Any event of this size will necessarily produce learnings for participants at every level. This inquiry is an important part of that process, and will no doubt uncover things that did not go as well as they could have. But it should not be allowed to become a process of scapegoating, and apportioning blame for the sake of holding someone, somewhere, responsible for the losses that were suffered.

At the outset, we must acknowledge that mistakes were made across the state, and at all levels of the response. This is the inevitable result of such a large series of fires, across so much country, for such a long period of time, and the unavoidable human aspect of that response. Everybody was stretched, and under extraordinary stresses, from local crews to IMTs to RFS headquarters, and indeed local communities across the state who were threatened by these fires. Some human error will always be a feature of any response – the more valuable question from which it is possible to improve is whether there were systemic or unreasonable errors.

A wide range of local issues and problems occurred across the state. Again, this is to be expected. We do not intend to canvas those issues within this submission. While there are a number of local issues that we believe could benefit from further action of some sort, we have raised and will continue to address these issues with the RFS directly. We do not consider this inquiry to be an appropriate forum to address local issues. Our focus will instead be on issues that affected the whole, or significant parts of the state. We would urge that the whole of the inquiry be conducted with the same focus.



## About the RFSA

The NSW Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) is proud to be the representative association of the volunteers and staff of the NSW Rural Fire Service. We are recognised in the *Rural Fires Act 1997* with representation on the Rural Fire Service Advisory Council and Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee, and are also represented on the Fire Services Joint Standing Committee.

The RFSA is managed by its members, and provides a range of services both to members and to the RFS. This includes:

- Chaplaincy and welfare support;
- Additional meal options and other supplies for members during s44 events;
- Grants to provide Brigades with additional equipment;
- Sponsorship of Brigade and major RFS events, such as the Australian Fire Cadet Championships, RFS District Managers' Forum, and Brigade anniversaries;
- Professional development scholarships for both volunteers and staff; and
- Volunteers' Family Days across the state.

With over 46,000 registered members, we are the authoritative voice in representing the volunteers of the RFS.

## Summary of recommendations

### *Recommendation 1*

Any increase in hazard reduction burn targets should be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the risks inherent in this activity, and the reality that those targets may not be able to be met.

### *Recommendation 2*

A review be undertaken into the effectiveness of decision-making concerning backburns in extreme weather conditions based on the experience of this fire season.

### *Recommendation 3*

The capital funding of the RFS be significantly increased to support a fleet upgrade as a matter of urgency. This upgrade should ensure that all appliances that are intended to be used in direct firefighting be equipped with fire curtains, overrun spray systems, and electric hose reels.

### *Recommendation 4*

The NSW Government should commit to providing whatever additional resources are necessary to supply all active RFS volunteers with any new PPE recommended as a result of the current review being conducted by the RFS.

### *Recommendation 5*

All active members of the RFS be provided with two complete sets of PPC suitable to their role.

### *Recommendation 6*

The NSW Government fast-track the rollout of the whole of the new Government Radio Network to improve operational communications and ensure RFS vehicles can be equipped with effective AVL.

### *Recommendation 7*

All firefighting appliances be equipped with CB radios as standard.

### *Recommendation 8*

The Fires Near Me app, and the underlying public information infrastructure, be updated to allow for more frequent and specific information to be disseminated, especially of fire spread mapping.

### *Recommendation 9*

The RFS develop a consistent solution to deliver GPS navigation and mapping capabilities to members on the fire ground.

### *Recommendation 10*

An integrated information technology system be developed to manage workload and workflows within IMTs.

## Cause of fires

The 2019/20 fire season was overwhelmingly driven by the prevailing weather conditions. Higher than usual temperatures, coupled with drier than usual conditions resulting in low moisture content in both fuel and the soil had a devastating effect on efforts to control fires. In simpler terms, we would say it was simply the combination of prolonged drought in NSW, and the extreme lack of rain during the fire season. These weather conditions resulted in fires behaving in ways that they have never behaved before. This is reflected in reports from members across the state who dealt with fires moving at a pace they had never before experienced, and in directions that had not previously experienced in their local area.

The frequent occurrence of pyro-convective clouds is further evidence of the unusual weather driving fire activity throughout the season. While these events were not unprecedented of themselves, and have been a feature of some major fires in the past (the Sir Ivan fire near Dunedoo in February 2017 being one example) the sheer number and frequency of these events during this season certainly was.

It cannot be denied that high fuel loads contributed to the devastation in some areas, however this cannot be considered as the sole, or even the major, contributing factor. Our members have referred to numerous instances of fires burning, at a pace that made their control impossible, through areas that had been burnt no less than 12 months prior. This was common both in areas that had been treated by hazard reduction burns, and also those burnt by bush fires during the previous season.

In addition to the weather having created the conditions that were conducive to fire spread, causing what may in other circumstances have been manageable fires to quickly escape control, it was the weather that also caused the vast majority of the fires to occur in the first place. Dry lightning storms ignited the vast majority of fires across the state (and those in Victoria and Queensland) throughout the season. While some fires were deliberately lit, these represent a small minority of the fire activity across the season, and should not be the focus of any discussions about the fire season as a whole.

We do not intend to make any comment about the underlying causes of the weather that contributed so significantly to the severity of this fire season. That is beyond our experience and expertise. However, we consider that it was this weather that had by far the greatest impact on the conditions facing not only our members, but the community at large. That is not to say that other factors should be ignored – there can be no doubt that the efforts of firefighters made an enormous difference to outcomes on the ground in terms of properties saved, even in circumstances where the overall spread of fire could not be controlled. But it is wishful thinking at best to suggest that the broader context of this fire season would have been significantly impacted by anything that the RFS (or anyone else) could have done.

## Hazard reduction

Fuel loads, and an alleged lack of hazard reduction, became a topic of immense media (and subsequently public) interest throughout the last fire season. As the theory goes, had more extensive hazard reduction been undertaken prior to the fire season its severity and extent would have been greatly reduced. This is an overly simplified approach that fails to take account of other factors.

In particular, we must recognise that hazard reduction does not offer comprehensive protection from the risk of bush fires. Our members have referred to numerous instances of fires burning, at a pace that made their control impossible, through areas that had been burnt no less than 12 months prior. Largely as a result of the weather that was driving so much fire activity, some hazard reduction burns achieved remarkably little benefit.

This is not to say that hazard reduction does not have a place, and should not continue to be pursued. There are areas that were effectively protected during the season as a result of previous hazard reduction activity. However, it is simply not practical to expect that significant additional hazard reduction will necessarily be able to be conducted, and even if it is it will not always provide the protection that is hoped for.

There are a number of factors that can prevent effective hazard reduction burns. Key amongst those is the weather. Burns cannot be put in when it's too wet. Similarly, burns cannot be put in when conditions are too hot, dry and windy. There is a limited window in which hazard reduction burns are possible, and in recent years that window has been narrower than it has previously been as the fire season starts earlier and ends later. Frustratingly, the very same weather that made this fire season so devastating made it more difficult to put in hazard reduction burns during the off-season.

There is also a need to acknowledge that hazard reduction burns are not without risk, both to life and property. While they are able to be much better controlled than backburns, as crews have total flexibility about the time and conditions in which they are lit, it is not possible to eliminate risk completely. These risks will only be amplified by increased hazard reduction activity, particularly against the backdrop of increased targets for hazard reduction burning. This is not simply a factor of more burns being lit. Increased hazard reduction activity will almost inevitably result in burns being lit in more marginal weather conditions. Every one of these burns will be more likely than a burn in optimal conditions to escape the control of firefighters. Some inevitably will, exposes both firefighters and the community to an increased risk of harm.

Despite this, hazard reductions burns undeniably have a place in providing a level of protection (however imperfect) from the risk of bushfires. They can be effective, and must continue to be practised wherever possible. In this context, we would not oppose an increase in targets for hazard reduction burning. But any increase in targets must come with a very clear acknowledgement of the risks inherent in this activity, and the reality that those targets may not be able to be met. There should also be a clear

understanding about what meeting (or failing to meet) the target means. The sheer number of variables are such that success (or failure) in meeting hazard reduction targets alone should not be a measure by which the Commissioner, Minister or Government of the day is judged, whether favourably or unfavourably.

*Recommendation 1*

Any increase in hazard reduction burn targets should be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the risks inherent in this activity, and the reality that those targets may not be able to be met.

## Backburning

While backburning was discussed a great deal in the public and media commentary regarding the fires, the term was typically used erroneously to refer to hazard reduction (or an alleged lack thereof). However, tactical backburning is a valuable tool in combating bush fires. Especially when dealing with larger fires, or those burning in more remote terrain, it may not be possible to directly attack the fire. In these cases, quite literally fighting fire with fire can be the only viable option available. Unfortunately, as with all aspects of firefighting, this tactic is not without risk. There is always the possibility that back burns (like hazard reduction burns) will escape the control of the crews that put them in. During this season that was a reality on a number of occasions. Most famously, back burns put in along the Bells Line of Road in an effort to stop the south-westerly spread of the Gospers Mountain fire got away from firefighters and destroyed several properties around the town of Bilpin on 15 December.

The decision to light a backburn (or to prevent the lighting of a backburn) always runs the risk of attracting criticism. It should not be surprising that we have heard many complaints about IMTs refusing to allow crews to put in backburns that they believed were necessary. It is equally unsurprising that we heard complaints about backburns that were put in and that subsequently escaped the control of firefighters. Criticism of individual decisions are perhaps more inevitable than some of those decisions having been wrong. We do not wish to delve into particular backburns that should or should not have been lit. These are complex decisions, in which there is often not a clearly correct answer, especially in the context of the fire season we've just experienced. There are two things of which we can be confident: if more backburns had been put in, some properties that were lost could have been saved; equally, if more backburns had been put in, some properties that were saved could have been lost to burns that escaped firefighter control. Unfortunately, we cannot be confident in declaring that either one of those factors would have outweighed the other.

Given the enormous extent of this past season, and the number of times backburns were requested (whether approved or not) there should be an opportunity to review in detail the effectiveness of decision-making around backburns, especially in the context of such difficult weather conditions. We would fully support this exercise being undertaken to help inform IMTs tasked with making these decisions during future fire events.

### *Recommendation 2*

A review be undertaken into the effectiveness of decision-making concerning backburns in extreme weather conditions based on the experience of this fire season.



## RFS Fleet

Like our members, the RFS vehicle fleet was worked harder during this past season than at any time in the past. This exposed a number of issues that need to be addressed as a matter of priority, particularly in relation to older vehicles in the fleet.

The age of so many fire appliances in the RFS is exposing our members to unnecessary risk, and impairing their ability to function as effectively as they could. It requires urgent, and significant, investment.

Older vehicles have a number of shortcomings. Key among these in relation to crew safety is a lack of protection systems. While newer appliances are equipped with fire curtains and spray systems, many older appliances are not. Even where they are equipped with sprays, in some cases these cannot be operated from within the cabin, requiring a crew member to exit an appliance that is at risk of being overrun by fire in order to start the pump to operate the spray. This is incredibly dangerous for the crews in those vehicles, especially in the context of the fast moving fires that were a feature of this season.

No member should be sent to fight a fire in a vehicle that does not have an adequate crew protection system. And yet, if we did not make use of these vehicles, there would have been a massive shortage of firefighters available to do the work that was needed. There needs to be a very significant increase in capital funding for the RFS to ensure that every vehicle that is intended to be used for direct firefighting has fire curtains and a spray system. There are some vehicles where it would be impractical or unnecessary to provide these protections, however they should be standard for all major appliances.

Another significant issue with older appliances is that they are often not equipped with electric hose reels, which became standard more recently. While such a feature may seem a luxury, during a prolonged event, and especially where crews are frequently moving positions, it makes a significant difference both to the safety and effectiveness of a crew. Not only can an electric hose reel be retracted quicker than a manual reel, allowing a crew to move positions sooner, it also helps to reduce crew fatigue and therefore improves safety.

### *Recommendation 3*

The capital funding of the RFS be significantly increased to support a fleet upgrade as a matter of urgency. This upgrade should ensure that all appliances that are intended to be used in direct firefighting be equipped with fire curtains, overrun spray systems, and electric hose reels.

## Personal protective equipment and clothing

Throughout the fire season, respiratory protection for firefighters was perhaps the most common point of public discussion outside the fires themselves. This was often reflected amongst our members as well, with a range of differing opinions about the appropriateness and effectiveness of various forms of respiratory protection, from wet fabric through to full-face P3 masks. We do not intend to canvas in detail the range of views among our members, nor the relative merits of different forms of respiratory protection, within this inquiry. Suffice it to say that we will support any form of personal protective equipment (PPE) that keeps our members safe and allows them to do their jobs.

To that end, we are encouraged by the actions of the RFS in commencing a comprehensive review of members' PPE. Indeed, this is something that we had been calling for in relation to respiratory protection in particular. This review is a worthwhile initiative, but it is not enough in itself. There must be a clear commitment from government that *all* new or varied PPE recommended for use by our members will be made available to *all* active volunteers for whom the equipment is relevant as soon as possible. This will, at a minimum, be a significant logistical undertaking. It is likely to also require additional funding to purchase equipment, although it is not possible either to say that with certainty, or quantify the possible expense, at this stage in the process.

### *Recommendation 4*

The NSW Government should commit to providing whatever additional resources are necessary to supply all active RFS volunteers with any new PPE recommended as a result of the current review being conducted by the RFS.

Another issue that is of significant concern is the lack of personal protective clothing (PPC) available to some members. In dealing with ongoing campaign fires, it is simply not good enough for some members to have only a single set of PPC. This leaves those members in the invidious position of having to choose either to re-wear soiled PPC, or to wash it and face going out the next day in wet clothing. Neither of these options is acceptable.

In raising this issue, it must be acknowledged that some members, particularly those who have been involved for many years, have accumulated multiple sets of PPC. Unfortunately, this does not in any way assist those members who are struggling to work during periods of ongoing fire activity with a single set of PPC. We recognise that the availability of PPC, and in particular the ability (or inability) of members to receive a second set of PPC, varies throughout the state. It is in some senses a local issue. We also acknowledge that the RFS has encountered difficulties with supplies of certain sizes in certain items following a change in supplier as a result of the recent update to standard issue PPC.



However, reports of members being unable to obtain a second set of PPC are sufficiently widespread that they require a coordinated and consistent approach for the benefit of all members. That approach must allow for all active members to receive two sets of PPC suitable to their role.

*Recommendation 5*

All active members of the RFS be provided with two complete sets of PPC suitable to their role.

## Logistics and catering

Logistics generally, and catering in particular, were significant problems across much of the state throughout the season. There were repeated issues that arose in relation to transport for out of area crews who were travelling to assist the firefighting effort. There were also significant challenges in managing fatigue of crews that were on the fireground. And there were a range of aspects of the catering effort that fell short across many different areas. In some cases, it was only the support of the Australian Defence Force that addressed these issues.

Firefighters were typically working 12 hour shifts, far removed from any local community infrastructure or food outlets. More often than not, they were reliant on some form of provision from the RFS in order to eat while on shift. Unfortunately, far too often they were let down, whether by the provision of inadequate food, the provision of unsafe food, or by not being fed at all. Some areas and IMTs performed this function better than others. It is not our intent to seek to single out those who performed better or worse.

Our concern is that what became apparent was that there was a total lack of consistency across the state, not only with regard to what was actually provided to firefighters on the ground, but in relation to what each IMT intended to provide. This systemic breakdown needs to be addressed, and while we are encouraged that the RFS has begun work on this issue, we are concerned that the extent of the problem has not been fully realised. The logistical challenges of feeding firefighters who are operating in relatively remote country are very real, and we do not pretend that this is a simple issue to address. However, it is difficult to overstate how important it is to ensure that our crews are adequately catered for while they perform difficult, dangerous and physically demanding work across long shifts.

To some extent, the problems faced in catering (and in logistics more generally) stem from a lack of manpower. For some time, the role of support volunteers has been undervalued relative to that of frontline firefighters. More focus is needed in this area, both within the existing structures of the RFS and in the recruitment of new volunteers. While the RFS would be unable to fulfil its role without deep ranks of firefighters, our firefighters are unable to effectively do their jobs without the logistical support to back them up, and those support roles often don't receive the focus or recognition they deserve.

## Communications

### Automatic vehicle location

At present, the majority of the RFS fleet is not equipped with automatic vehicle location (AVL) capability. Put simply, AVL is the ability to see where all our vehicles are in real time, and is essential for the safety of our firefighters. If a crew gets into trouble on the fireground, it's impossible to send them help without knowing where they are.

AVL capability has already been developed for many other emergency service agencies, albeit with varying levels of success. For example, the Fire & Rescue (FRNSW) AVL capability relies primarily on mobile phone networks. While this is appropriate for the areas in which they typically operate, we are aware of a number of instances during the fire season where FRNSW appliances assisting with bushfires were unable to be located as they were operating in areas without mobile phone reception. This is a much more significant issue for RFS vehicles, which by the nature of our geographic spread are very often operating in areas without mobile reception. This makes the task of equipping our vehicles with effective AVL more complex than it is for others. Ultimately, it means we will need to rely on the broader coverage footprint of the Government Radio Network (GRN), rather than mobile phone networks, to ensure we have an effective AVL capability.

Unfortunately, the rollout of AVL capability is being held back by the slow pace of the GRN build. The upgrade of the GRN needs to be accelerated to ensure that all RFS vehicles can be equipped with an effective AVL capability as soon as possible. We acknowledge that the NSW Government has recently announced some additional funding to fast-track the build of parts of the GRN, but there is still much more to do to ensure statewide coverage that would make AVL a practical possibility for the RFS.

### Radio problems

There remain areas where RFS radios do not have coverage, and this contributed to communication problems during the fire season, particularly along the Great Dividing Range, which saw so much fire activity this season. While radio coverage across the state is important to operations, priority should be given to areas with multiple dwellings that do not currently have any coverage, or which currently experience poor coverage.

#### *Recommendation 6*

The NSW Government fast-track the rollout of the whole of the new Government Radio Network to improve operational communications and ensure RFS vehicles can be equipped with effective AVL.

NSW Farmers have for some time been raising concerns about their inability to communicate with RFS vehicles due to the lack of citizens band (CB) radios in most RFS vehicles. While group vehicles are generally equipped with CB radios, they are not fitted as standard on other appliances, despite all new trucks being equipped with an antenna for CB radio.

While in some circumstances a CB radio in a group officer's vehicle may be sufficient, there are many situations where a group officer may not be in a position to relay critical information to the local community. This can occur either during major fire events, such as what was experienced so often throughout this past summer, where group officers were simply too busy dealing with their crews and IMT to deal with members of the community; or in an initial response where a group officer is not yet available.

Providing a CB radio to all RFS vehicles will allow for improved communication with the community, and in particular with local farmers, and with truck drivers and many caravanners who may be passing through an area experiencing fire activity at times where a group officer is not available to fulfil this function.

#### *Recommendation 7*

All firefighting appliances be equipped with CB radios as standard.

#### Fires Near Me app

The RFS should be congratulated for producing the Fires Near Me app. The app is an incredible achievement, and has made fire information, and the RFS, more accessible and relevant to the general public. It became an incredibly valuable source of information and advice for the community, with not only rapidly growing user numbers, but frequent use by a large proportion of those users. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of all involved, the app was unable to keep pace the increasing public demand for detailed and updated information. Significant work will need to be undertaken to develop the next iteration of the app, and facilitate more frequent updates, particularly to mapping. (While delays in updating the maps within Fires Near Me was not a result of any shortcoming within the app itself, it represents a major public demand for information that will need to be addressed.)

Another issue that has arisen is the lack of clarity in some of the advice contained within the app, which has in some cases resulted in unnecessary panic. This is particularly a problem with the default status of new incidents being "out of control" rather than "being investigated" or something similar.

#### *Recommendation 8*

The Fires Near Me app, and the underlying public information infrastructure, be updated to allow for more frequent and specific information to be disseminated, especially of fire spread mapping.

## Mapping

There is no consistent approach to equipping RFS appliances or members with mapping capabilities. There are two elements to this issue – the first is the lack of fire and topographic mapping available to members, and the second is the lack of GPS navigation available within appliances. It is possible, although not essential, that these issues could both be addressed by the availability of a single device within fire appliances.

While all members have access to the Common Operating Picture (COP) through MyRFS, this is only available when they have access to mobile phone reception. It must also be recognised that it has not been designed for ease of use on a mobile device during active firefighting. (It should also be noted that access to the COP through MyRFS relies on the use of a volunteer's own mobile device and their personal data allowance.) Both these factors represent a disadvantage to a dedicated mapping product that is intended for use in the field, which we suggest needs to be implemented.

The existing *Collector* application does not adequately fulfil this need. Although it is quite effective in providing a portal for members in the field to send information back to an IMT, it is much less appropriate for pushing information back out. It relies on the mobile phone network to both send and receive data, often with very large data packets involved.

We are also cognisant of the fact that many of our members operate in areas with limited or no mobile phone reception. Any mapping product that is made available must be able to work without mobile reception (such as by data transfer through the GRN) or be supported by an effective non-digital alternative, which is likely to be the continued use of physical maps. We do not wish to be prescriptive about the solution, but there is a need for something to be developed that can meet the mapping needs of members on a consistent basis.

### *Recommendation 9*

The RFS develop a consistent solution to deliver GPS navigation and mapping capabilities to members on the fire ground.

## Technology within IMTs

There is a general lack of use of technology, and in particular a lack of integrated technologies, within Incident Management Teams (IMTs).

The use of paper request forms for communication between units in an IMT has at times allowed requests and messages to be lost, with no ability to go back and check completion. The lack of an integrated technology solution also means that it is not possible to easily see where a particular function in an IMT may not be meeting the demands placed on it until the impact reaches a critical, potentially life threatening situation. This shortcoming becomes increasingly acute the more fires any one IMT is attending to.

The high dependence in IMTs on whiteboards, spreadsheets and sheets of paper highlights the lack of an information technology solution for these critical roles in managing bushfire emergencies.

By way of example, a logistics officer will typically use a spreadsheet to manage accommodation arrangements for out of area firefighters. This information, detailing which firefighters are in the area and when, is not readily available to the officer managing resourcing on a fire.

While the current, largely siloed workflows may be adequate for an IMT that is managing only one major fire, it is much less appropriate for an IMT that is dealing with several major fires concurrently, as was often the case during the last fire season.

The solution will not be easy, but we would urge the RFS to urgently begin work to develop an integrated information technology system to manage workload and workflows within IMTs.

### *Recommendation 10*

An integrated information technology system be developed to manage workload and workflows within IMTs.



## RFS administration

One of the issues that become apparent throughout the season was that, like the rest of the organisation, the RFS's administration was stretched beyond its capacity. This was evident in a lack of logistics capability, the inability to provide sufficient staff to support IMTs, and in sometimes significant delays within the finance area. This should not be seen as a reflection on the capacity or efforts of staff, but rather as exposing the reality of too few resources being available within the administration to adequately respond to such a large event.

The best example of this is perhaps within the finance area. Timeliness of payments was a major issue throughout the fire season. Some suppliers were not paid for months after providing invoices. It must be acknowledged that accounts payable is not a simple function in the context of major fire events, and there is the potential for significant losses due to either error or fraud, whether on the part of suppliers or staff. Checks and balances are an essential component of any finance system, and these cannot be abandoned during major events (indeed, this is likely to be when those checks are more important than ever). There is nonetheless a need for finance processes to be reviewed in detail to ensure that payments can be made in a timely manner during major fire events.

## Other issues

### Storz / Camlock compatability

A common problem, particularly in border areas, was the incompatibility between the Storz and Camlock hose fittings used by the RFS and Victorian CFA. The differences between these fittings prevent appliances from different services transferring water to one another. This issue also affected the ability of private water tankers to be used to refill RFS appliances in some situations. Consideration should be given to stocking adapters on RFS appliances, at least in border areas where interstate services use different fittings.

### Fire trails

A recurring issue that arises following major fire events is the poor standard of many fire trails. Trails are very often the only means for getting firefighters and appliances to the scene of a fire. Unfortunately, they are often poorly maintained, and this can delay or even prevent the arrival of firefighters. There needs to be more focus on ensuring fire trails are appropriately cleared and maintained.

### Public service leave during s44 events

The State Government provides all public servants with unlimited leave in order to volunteer during declared s44 events. This is a significant benefit that has allowed many of our members to assist more during the fire season than they would have otherwise been able to. However, while this leave has been beneficial, not all members have been able to take advantage of it. We have had reports from some members that their managers did not appropriately task out their work while they were assisting as volunteers, and this in effect prevented them taking further leave to volunteer. There should be a uniform approach across the public service to ensure this leave is practically, rather than merely theoretically, available to all members.