

Submission to NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

My background is in rural NSW as a farmer and cattle breeder for over 60 years. For 20 years from 1975 to 1996 I was also a Ranger and District Manager in the NSW National parks and Wildlife Service managing reserves in the Dorrigo, Tibooburra, Coonabarabran and Glen Innes Districts as well as fire management in many other areas of the State.

I believe the following points need serious consideration for future fire management.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE.

This is essential in all pre-planning, - access- seasonal conditions-reducing fuel loads-quick response to fires- predicting fire behaviour- control measures- logistics.

Too often in emergencies the local community and local land managers are ignored when the emergency fire management comes under bureaucratic control.

SEASONAL CONDITIONS.

With predictions of hotter and drier conditions in the future, change is needed.

The fires of 2019-2020 were intensified by the drought, similar conditions have occurred in the past. Fuel reduction is essential, however conditions favourable for this have a very limited window of opportunity, maybe only 5-10 day a year when it is possible to safely carry out the burning. Aboriginal style burning understood this.

Local land managers need the flexibility and authority to burn at short notice when weather conditions are favourable, e.g. When I was managing Gibraltar Range National Park, firebreaks were prepared, staff ready at 6a.m., I had to get approval from the Regional Office before lighting. No one available till 9a.m.- no approvals till 2.p.m.. This was too late to commence in the heat of the day. – weather changed next day. – 3 Months later the whole park burnt in a wildfire.

TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT.

This has improved greatly over the years thanks to Govt. and Volunteers efforts. More work needs to be done with liaison between organisations, R.F.S.- Forestry – NPWS- Landowners - and community groups regarding

{2}

planning, and lines of command. Local knowledge needs to be recognised, encouraged and utilised. Joint exercises between Govt. Authorities and the RFDS. need to be on a regular basis.

COMMUNICATIONS.

Mobile Phones now seem to be the best way compared with old radio technology. To be effective there needs to be mobile towers to give coverage in remote and rugged terrain. Back up power supply for towers and charging batteries.

Contacts for emergency need to be 24/7. The 000 calls are often difficult with the operators having no local knowledge or understanding of locations or situations, again LOCAL "Knowledge". Not 9-5-weekdays office hours.

e.g.- A fire on Dorrigo Mountain was reported by a local at 5a.m. and again at 6 a.m.- crews finally arrived at 9 a.m. This ended up a major fire. Quick response is essential.

The ABC local radio has done a marvellous job in the last season. However we still need to keep some local content. E.g. Once the major fires moved to south of Sydney the fires still burning since November in the North were forgotten and we couldn't see for the smoke.

The Fires near me APP is good but needs more detail such as active fronts and control lines.

Rod Holmes

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]