

## **Preparedness**

- State Forest and pine plantations had done little at all to prepare for a fire. Roads were poorly maintained. No water spots were identified, and buffer zones were overgrown with blackberries.
- There had been very few controlled burns to reduce fuel loads.
- Maintenance of access roads should be a priority. This was a big access issue and may have prevented the spread of fire had the access been better. Ensure that there is adequate surveillance - the only difference between a small fire and big fire is time. A forester said that the reason that The Dunn's Rd fire got away was that the original lightning strike was obscured by the smoke from Canberra fires, surely heat sensing technology and/or AI would have detected it.
- The amount of grass growing along the edges of the roads in rural areas is a real issue for preparation. It was long and unkept. e. In some places the phalaris was over one metre tall and there are huge amounts of herbage to fuel a fire. Farmers are not permitted to graze the shoulders of the roads, and hence there is no fuel load reduction before fire season.
- Fire control needed to involve more locals with knowledge of the landscape to help with planning.
- There was no forward planning to reduce erosion and pollution caused by rain post fire. This has severely impacted properties.

## **Response**

- Front line operations are exceptional in response and need to be commended and maintained.
- Financial emergency support for business was poor and very slow. The clean-up costs and priorities for what was to be addressed and who was responsible needed to be clarified. Given the enormity of the problems derived from the fires a response from the Federal and State Gov outlining how they will respond in the future with timelines is important.
- When the fires were deemed too dangerous, by both the RFS and State Forests, landholders and Batlow residents were left to defend their properties. Local council was non-existent. Council's role during the fire was to support RFS and provide resources where they request as well as looking after assets and services.
- Time was the key. Local brigades did a very good job in areas inaccessible to fire trucks. There needed to be a way to get water to trucks and slip-ons quickly. This caused many to run out of water and be away from the fire for long periods of time.
- Evacuation centres were found however they should be highlighted and known in the community before an emergency. Poor communication skills from heads of dept. Daily trustworthy bulletins were not issued and needed to be. Information sources needed to be trustworthy and accurate. This was not always the case
- Fire stations need to be equipped for people to be able to rest, often it was too far to go home, or there is a reluctance to go home and to have had a couple of hours comfortable sleep would have been of great benefit.
- Locals and essential services eg: vets were stopped by police to providing help and services when needed. While there is a need to prevent the sightseer there is a place for common sense.
- LLS responded well to animal welfare issues.
- Cross border issues were very real and lacked basic common sense. It outlined the absurdities of the border. This needs to be addressed and have a system of shared

responsibility throughout both jurisdictions of NSW and Victoria. ACT and NSW border issues are an example of effective management where there was good liaison between agencies and joint decision making about important issues.

- Number of farming properties burnt was 960. Some with homes destroyed most with annual income diminished.
- Too much traffic on the fire radio. Sometimes it was inaccessible when needed.
- The Forestry Industry and National Parks need to pay more attention to reducing fuel load. Forestry - control blackberries which significantly contributed to the ferocity of the fire and increase the distance from plantations to private land.

## **Resilience**

- Smaller communities although resilient are affected far more by impact on local business and the effect of a lack of employment opportunities. There is an aging demographic with a youth migration away from these communities. Education and on job training with nationally recognised qualifications needs to be offered to attract or keep younger people in these areas. New technologies and R&D are good examples. Resilience is compounded by confidence and by promoting these areas and supporting business in all avenues, incentivising, grants, gives confidence for employment, visitors and customers. If we don't achieve backing from State and Federal government to recovery from the fires the small community of Batlow and Tumbarumba will decline. Years of developments in apple orchards, vineyards and grazing land have been lost.
- Communications was a large concern. Since the advent of mobile phones some farms were without a UHF. This was made worse by no electricity, no landline. People found not having mobile phone access very difficult. There needs to be a big push to stop all black spots in the region in order to allow communities to be resilient or find alternative technologies that are more effective and practical in mountainous areas.
- Response after the fire needs to be as quick as possible so that people feel supported and able to make good decisions. In agriculture decisions made in that period immediately after the fire can have a big economic impact and can have long term effects on the business.

## **Recovery and looking to the future.**

- The opportunity to control feral animals and noxious weeds should be seized while the burnt country allows for better vision. Eradicate and control now.
- Discussion with pine plantations, national parks, forestry and graziers need to take place. Future planning needs to be carefully considered to allow grazing buffers of at least 100 metres between plantations to stop the spread of fire.
- Planning permission should be asked of council or NSW government before any future planting are made to ensure the correct buffer zones are put in place.
- Access roads always need to be maintained
- Satellite phones in fire trucks and a mobile phone tower that can withstand fire and remain working in an emergency would be essential prior to the next fire season
- Fire spotting needs to be improved. Using AI and heat seeking technology used to ensure accuracy.
- An apology or a statement of acknowledgement from Hume Forest, on whose land the Dunns Road fire, started is needed by all landholders.
- Blackberries can no longer be stated as being controlled. They need to be eradicated. Their proliferation was larger responsible for the intensity of the fire. Controlling

blackberries with Garzon or Brushoff chemical is cheap and achievable. There needs to be a regulatory change to ensure this eradication takes place.

- National Parks need to do more controlled burns as appropriate.
- Communities need to ensure that their vital amenities are backed up and protected. eg: Backburn around communications towers at the beginning of summer. Essential services eg fuel stations/telecommunications infrastructure have generators on hand at all times and these are regularly checked to ensure that they are right to go in an emergency.
- Allow farmers to graze the sides of the road.
- Post fire erosion and pollution should be documented and sent to the EPA for regulatory change for future land management strategies.
- There needs to be more capacity for aerial response.
- Fire control should stick to overall logistics and resourcing, not running the fire ground. Locals have a good knowledge to run the fire ground with local knowledge. Their opinions and information need to be listened to.
- Rural Fire Service to provide and maintain slip-ons.
- Briefing sessions should be well organised and accessible. Heads of dept should have public speaking lessons as the communication was very poor. This is referring to meetings held at evacuation centres in major regional areas away from the fire.
- Part of the emergency response should be to have a communication from the RFS person who gives daily bulletins available physically eg local notice board and online.
- Cross border issues to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- The fire radio needs to be split: one channel for fire operations; one channel for logistics like food, lunches and reports of safe return to base.
- Water points need to be updated and highlighted clearly.
- Create a Country University Centre and upskill TAFE to train youth to have local ongoing employment.
- No community should ever be declared UNDEFENDABLE. Ever.