



Title	Mr
First name	Stephen
Last name	Currie
I am making this submission as	Emergency services
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	RFS Member
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>There are 3 aspects of the bush-fire crisis which I would like to address.</p> <p>I feel that RFS members are being put at risk due to fatigue and excessive hours on the fire-ground is something that needs to be addressed. Repton, as many other Rural Fire Brigades, has an aging membership, the average age of our brigade is over 60, yet we were expected to spend 12 hours on the fire-ground. When you consider sometimes we spent 2-3 hours getting to the FG, often driving home in the early hours of the morning along unfamiliar mountain roads, I think it was just pure luck that we didn't have fatalities through fatigue. I understand in emergencies, RFS members generally have no choice but to stay and fight, my concern is when no accommodation is offered to weary fire-fighters. I will give an example, 2 members of our brigade, both over 65, went to work a night shift at Bees Nest. They drove 3 hours to the FG, then spent the night doing property protection until 7am. They had no replacement crews</p>

arrive, so were asked to stay until relieved, which was 10am. They then had a 3 hour drive down the mountain from Dorrigo whilst extremely fatigued. A micro sleep could easily have resulted in a loss of life. When we have driver education programs advising to take a break after 2 hours of driving, these excessive hours are just ridiculous. If we were being paid, this would be illegal. After such a prolonged shift, fire-fighters should either be given accommodation in the local area, or a driver/s to take them home. Locals would gladly open their homes for fire-fighters, and community incentives should be explored further. We frequently put longer hours than NPWS and Forestry Commission staff, who generally are 30-40 years younger. They don't put in as long days because they would be paid overtime. 8 hour shifts on the FG should be the norm. Members of my brigade and myself did not commit as often as we would of liked due to the excessive shifts on the FG.

Equipment is another issue. The face masks are plainly inadequate when faced with such ferocious fires. Our brigade bought cotton and alpaca wool masks last year which appear to do a better job. Torches are another issue, when working at night it is easy to fall over and potentially break a leg, 2 years ago we got issued 8 helmet torches, not enough for every active member, so again we bought our own better quality head-torches. Our fund-raising should not be the way to get essential equipment. My brother is also a fire-fighter down near Bombala, his brigade asked for new face masks last year only to be told there wasn't enough money to buy new ones. A member of his brigade asked to replace his yellows, only to be told there were no new clothes available and he would have to be pay \$129 if he wanted new equipment. I went to FCC in Coffs only last month asking to replace my yellows, again none available.

The 3rd issue is lack of fire-fighting helicopters and aircraft. How many of these fires could of been put out early if aircraft were available? My brother was talking to a Victorian captain who said he asked for 2 helicopters to put out a small fire deep in a forest, he was told none were available. Weeks later, that fire roared into Mallacoota. I can't verify that this story is absolutely true, but we were certainly not prepared for this past fire season.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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