
Title	Mr
First name	John
Last name	Grimshaw

I am making this submission as	Emergency services
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Submission type	Organisation
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Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	Woodford Rural Fire Brigade
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Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Senior Deputy Captain
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Consent to make submission public	Public
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Your story	<p>As a Senior Deputy Captain of Woodford RFS Brigade in the Blue Mountains, I get to stand in front of a few fires. In my 17 years of being in the RFS, we have had our share of fires in the Mountains. A couple of largish ones, a ton of little ones – and then there was the season just gone.</p> <p>The “Riches Ave” fire in November 2019 in Woodford fire highlighted a problem for our community – both locally in Woodford and in the wider context of the mountains.</p> <p>One of the unique problems we have in the Mountains is a long, skinny area of residential living. It is a 70 kilometre ribbon of residential living, much of which is just metres from the beautiful bushland – and of course the added bush fire risk. In this district, almost every house has an urban/bushland interface, and complication this brings to fighting fires is huge.</p> <p>We were fortunate. The weather was, for the most part, on our side and we managed to contain the fire and not lose any</p>
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houses. The key to this was bringing in massive resources – resources that were plucked from across the Mountains and from Sydney. It does not take much imagination to see what the devastation could have been had the fires truly reached the urban interface in the months ahead.

One of the key elements that made this November firefight successful was the setting up of the command post and staging area at Woodford Station. It provided a necessary function that was instrumental in saving houses.

This may not be possible in the future.

The council-owned land and brigade station at 2 Park Rd, Woodford is right next to a block of land owned by Sydney Water. We have long had an agreement to be able to use the land if we needed – and in this incident, we used every inch of both blocks of land to coordinate trucks, feed crews, setup a divisional command, provide public information, as well as just managing our own brigade and its firefighters.

In the last couple of years, we have become aware of a plan by Sydney Water to sell off the land, because it is not needed by them. From what I understand, Sydney Water now has a commercial imperative to “realise” the asset value for land that is not required.

If we were to lose access to that land, the implications would be serious for any future firefighting effort.

Woodford is one of the ONLY brigades in the mid-mountains where you could “stage” a fleet of trucks AND manage a fully formed IMT (Incident Management Team), AS WELL AS the multi-service support that includes Fire And Rescue NSW, Police, Ambulance, National Parks, RSPCA, and Sydney Water itself when fire impacts the catchment area.

We are the ONLY mid-mountains brigade station with instant access to the highway, AND the ability to turn east or west as required.

There have been fire seasons where we have had a Strike Team sitting here waiting to respond to a call out. The Brigade station not only enables these trucks to park, but it also provides the amenities and support, such as food, water, toilet and space for rest. All of these are needed to deal with a bunch of firefighters waiting to get to work.

The recent fires saw both Police and Fire and Rescue NSW use our facilities at the same time to manage the Woodford “Riches Ave” fire. During the 2001-2002 fires impacting the southern half of the Blue Mountains, Woodford Brigade provided 600 meals each and every day to the various crews.

So, our small patch of dirt currently helps a large part of the Mountains.

There is a window of opportunity for the State Government to take land it already “owns” and make it an essential community resource. Our brigade would like to see the whole site developed properly with an eye to making its use in times of emergency more effective and safer.

In non-firefighting times, it could and should be an open area for the community to use. Our brigade station is the only community space in the village. It is a polling station at elections, It is a gathering place on Anzac Day. Carving up the land around the station would have a huge impact on all these operations. Its loss would be significant locally and would come as a shock to our community.

The actions we would like to see are as follows:

- the State Government “Gift” this land to the Blue Mountains City Council
- the land should be redeveloped – perhaps using this opportunity to build a modern brigade station that also incorporates/considers the community uses of the site

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

This submission directly goes towards addressing Preparation and Planning for future emergencies in the Blue Mountains.

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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WRFB-Station-Land-Labelled.jpg - [Download File](#)

