

Productivity Commission

Telecommunications Universal Service Obligations

Dubbo Hearing March 30th January 2017

Submission prepared by Trevor Coady on behalf of Washpen Bush Fire Brigade

And TP and JM Coady – Farmers and Graziers

Currently deputy captain of the Washpen Bush Fire Brigade, previously Captain for 10 years, Manager of Farming enterprise covering 5300 acres.

Washpen is in the Canobolas zone of the Rural Fire Service, west of Yeoval and joins the Goobang National Park for 30 km. Washpen and Baldry brigade have a total park boundary of approximately 53 km, along the eastern side of the National Park. The area of Washpen and Baldry brigades is 777 sq km. This area has no mobile phone service.

When it comes to fires the response time can make the difference between someone losing their home, or a pasture fire turning into a catastrophic event. The old saying stands – if its small you can put it out with a garden hose.

On a number occasions during my time as Captain I spent the first 45 minutes to an hour trying to contact brigade members on the landline or CB radio. This is a difficult task. Today we have population decline and more women from the land are working in off farm jobs. You have to be lucky to contact people on the landline. This delayed response time can have a monumental impact. The cost of a large fire to individuals who lose their home, livestock or pasture, and the public who foot the bill for fighting fires is also massive. The recent Woolomin fire cost well over 2 million dollars. 160 personnel, 25 tankers per shift, crane helicopter, 3 fixed wing aircraft, Hercules plane, and 7 dozers. And the potential for loss of life.....

On 3rd December 2001 lightning started 3 fires on private property and 1 in the Goobang NP, all within the Washpen brigade area. While the fires in open country were contained that afternoon the fire in the NP continued to burn and a section 44 declared on the 3rd December and finally revoked on the 3rd January 2002. During the fire, firefighting operations were severely hindered by the lack of direct communication between the on ground Captain and the incident management team. This was highlighted on the 19th of December when back burn operations were ordered by the Incident Management Team stationed at Peak Hill without consultation with on ground crews. Local brigades were not in favour of extending the back burn another 15 km when a catastrophic fire day was forecast for the next day. There was no direct communication with incident management team whereby this strong message could be conveyed. As a result the personnel on the ground the next day could not cope with the extent of the back burn and the terrible day. Lives were placed in danger and 12000 ha of private property were burnt out, 4000 sheep, 130 cows and a number of farm buildings and hundreds of kilometres of fencing lost.

Following the Goobang fire the Coroner recommended, among other things, "that there be established a mobile telephone repeater in the Goobang NP to service the community and to provide additional communications during fire." I have enclosed a copy of the Coroner's report.

In subsequent years the RFS brigades within Canobolas zone have been diligent in trying to get to fires early. This has been hindered greatly by lack of mobile service. You just can't get anyone on the landline. Pagers have been a useful addition to notify members of fires but these have limitations as they only allow one way communication. RFS cannot receive a reply that the message has been received and crews are responding. A system has been developed called Broadcast, Alert, Respond, Turnout (BART). This is an

app on phones and tablets and it allows 2 way communications. RFS send the message and crews can respond with message received – on my way or not available. Unfortunately we cannot utilise this amazing tool as we don't have mobile service.

Rural people suffer disadvantage in accessing emergency service in the event of an accident or a significant health event such as a heart attack. Significant delays due to poor communication can mean life or death. I work alone and the thought of an accident is not a pleasant thought, and it scares the hell out of my family now that I am getting a bit older.

It is unfathomable that in the north of Vietnam, in a remote village, the people have mobile service. Yet in Australia rural areas where businesses are conducted that provide a significant proportion of the nation's GDP have no mobile service available. Productivity is compromised whilst waiting for return calls. I have had to sit and wait at the house for a number of hours sometimes when waiting for an important call. Often the people you are calling assume you have mobile service and don't even return your call to the landline. When you go to town 4 days later you find a message on the mobile from the missed call. Even your own website requiring registration for today had a compulsory mobile phone number box which we did not complete – why – because we cannot get mobile service. This is unacceptable in this age of technology. All businesses today need mobile service.

Rural people need to be involved in the future. This can only be achieved with appropriate services. Future generations are not interested in living in areas that lack basic infrastructure and easily accessible services. To do so leaves them feeling out of touch and excluded.

The farming business has satellite broadband. This service may be slightly better than what we had previously, but in comparison to city counterparts it is far slower, drops out frequently and is more expensive. In the first month it was installed we had no service 5 times, each time for 1 to 3 days. Not good enough when you have wages and bills to pay etc.

Trevor Coady

Deputy Captain

Washpen Bush Fire Brigade

In the Coroners Court
WELLINGTON

(Sitting at Burwood)

Coronial Inquiry into the fires within the
Goobang National Park, Yeoval
3rd December, 2001 to 3rd January, 2002. (110 of 2002)

Coronial Inquiry into Fire on Forbes Road
Eugowra (108 of 2002)
20th December, 2001

Coronial Inquiry into Fire at Warburton Stud,
Two Mile Flat, Mudgee (109 of 2002)
24th December, 2001.

The brief of evidence into Fires within the Western Region of New South Wales is comprised within a brief of evidence of some 286 pages and was Exhibit "1" in the Inquiry held at the Wellington Local Court in the week commencing 25th November, 2002.

To have some appreciation or basic understanding of the Fire(s) within the National Park a very useful document, or flow-chart was prepared by Sgt Helen Halcro of Strike Force Tronto, the Investigative Team dated 21st November, 2002.

'Belmore' Station which adjoins the National Park near Yeoval was struck by lightning on 3rd December, 2001. Canobalas Fire Control was notified and an aeroplane despatched. Despite the success of extinguishment of this particular fire, lightning also struck within the park, confirmed by Satellite imaging. The co-ordinates of the strike were not compatible and had to be transposed or translated into co-ordinates more readily understood by personnel on the ground. The Fire then burning in the area of Claggers Creek was in a quite inaccessible region and by 11 pm on that first night the decision had been taken by NPWS that the fire represented too much danger to leave ground crews at the Fire Front. A series of back burns were undertaken the following morning basically covering the Tintinvale Trail, Niko's Trail and down to Tooringley Road.

By 5.00 p.m. on the second day, that is December 4th a Section 44 Order under the Rural Fires Act, 1997 had been declared. Superintendent Bowden became the

incident controller. Backburning continued using heavy earth moving equipment from Nicko's Trail to the Tomingley Road.

By the Third day December, 5th backburning was continuing basically along the parks Western boundary. Minimal rainfall on the fourth day resulted in some containment of the fire within the boundaries of the Park. By 7.00 pm on the Fourth day the Section 44 Order had been revoked. IMT, or Incident Management Control Centre passed responsibility of fire containment back to the NPWS. Officers of the NPWS then maintained perimeter checks and what was generally referred to as mopping up or blackening out operations, basically along the Claggers Creek and Nicko's trail areas.

Professional opinions differed as to the extent to which this mopping up cum surveillance procedure should have been undertaken. Various witnesses, including Fire Fighters attached to the Washpen Fire Unit offered an opinion that no less than two units with appropriate crew should have been deployed to oversee the extinguishment of the fire with a frequency of not less than twice daily. The NPWS on the other hand determined that one unit with crew could satisfactorily attend the situation once daily. Whilst professional opinions differed, clearly there was no perimeter or park related fire mopping up operations conducted in the period 15th through to 17th December, 2001 whilst the relevant officer was on scheduled time off or leave.

On 16th December, that is during this non supervision, non patrolled period smoke was seen to be coming from within the park. Similarly on the following day there were yet further sightings of smoke coming from within the Park boundaries. Late that same day, that is December, 17th NPWS rangers saw fire generally in the Claggers Creek Trail and Claggers Spring Trails. The prevailing north easterly winds blowing late in the afternoon of December 17th were fanning no less than three separate fires. By nightfall on 18th December, 2001 yet another declaration under Section 44 under the Rural Fires Act, 1997 was made, the second within a fortnight. The Washpen brigade had been despatched to deal with the fire(s) within the Park.

There was a flurry of activity, Fire fighting strategies implemented late into the night of 17th including a dozer trail generally in the vicinity of the ridge to Wanda Wandong Trail. By mid-day on 18th December the extent of spot overs had become uncontrollable and the site was evacuated in the interests of primary safety for fire fighters. Controversy continues at the propriety of retreating from the fire front, a differing view prevailing, even at the time, to remain and confront the fire.

Against the wishes or views of principally the Washpen Brigade the decision was confirmed to continue with the backburn and to tie in containment line. The view to call a halt to backburning is to be readily found in the forecasts of mid 30 C temperatures, a humidity factor of less than 20% and gusting N.W./S.W. winds. It is not difficult to appreciate the "on the ground" view of the propriety of persisting with the backburn.

By 20th December, 2001 the Belmore Sector Fire had become uncontrollable. The fire raged to within 15K's from the township of Yeoval. It was not until the New Year, indeed on 3rd January this year, 2002 that the Section 44 was revoked.

The Section 44 reports (Ex 6 & 7) detail activities during the currency of the Orders and the debriefs conducted in February of this year, 2002.

If I may quote from pg 13 of the Claggers Spring Fire it reads:

The following observations need to be made in the light of the extreme fire conditions leading up to and following the breakout which were positive despite the damage caused by the fire:

No human life was lost

No major firefighter injuries

No homes were lost

The importance of holding the major breakout until 1515 hours was crucial as the fire travelled some 16Km in 3 hours. An earlier breakout would have increased the size of the fire significantly and made it impossible to hold within the size of the final containment lines.

A breakout further north would have impacted country north of Obley/Tomingley Road in country that would have made it virtually impossible to hold the fire.

Weather conditions created a very extreme fire day.

Weather conditions were too dangerous to put crews in the park to directly attack the fire.

If the back burn had not been put in or completed the crews would have been confronted with the main fire leaving the National Park under the same prevailing weather conditions.

The report summary appearing on page 32 of the Same Section 44 report reads:

Fire Started on Monday 17th December, 2001 and was contained principally within the National Park for two and a half days.

Extreme weather conditions were experienced on Thursday 20th December, 2001 causing the fire to break from the National Park and burn 11583 hectares of private land.

No human lives were lost

There were no serious injuries.

No homes were lost

The impact on the eighteen properties and their families has created a burden of anxiety with emotional and financial difficulty.

The total area burnt including National Park was 27,690 ha.

The total perimeter of the fire was 110.3 K's

The General Manager of Cabonne Shire Council, Has made a submission to these Inquiries. Quoting only partially from its submission of 15th November, 2002 it reads:

".....Council's major concern is that the failure to activate the District Displan had the potential to cause serious ramifications especially if weather conditions had not eased on 25th December, 2001.

Council would like to submit to the Coroner, that consideration be given to having all District Displans contain a clause which automatically activates them where two or more Local Displans within the District have been activated. This would not only obviate the concerns raised by Council, but would also ensure a more coordinated approach to allocation of scarce resources during such periods of emergency.

The Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales has provided some thirty four (34) recommendations in its 32 page submission. Many of these are the subject of submissions by the various parties granted leave at the Inquiry.

The State Coroner John Abernethy on 23rd January, 2002 invited submissions from the Director General of National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Commissioner NSW Fire Brigades and The Commissioner NSW Rural Fire Service. In large measure a number of the issues and aspects flagged by the State Coroner have been the subject of and incorporated within the Joint Select Committee on Bushfires. The Select made no less than twenty (20) recommendations summarised or Consolidated in the Executive Summary preceding Chapter one. The Select Committees report became Exhibit 4 in this Inquiry.

Superintendent Hoadley offered his opinions to this Inquiry on a range of issues. In the interval between the initial and subsequent fires within the National Park he offered the opinion or view that the rural Fire Service would have patrolled the area and the fire was "deemed" to be out. That involved he said the complete blackening out of the affected area. Specifically in relation to Mr. Porch of the National Parks and Wildlife Service the Superintendent held the view that Mr. Porch had done an excellent job in the National Park and his wisdom has been both called upon and relied upon. It was known and accepted at that crucial evening meeting that Mr. Porch had been the Deputy Captain of the Local Brigade, he was a local landholder and commanded the respect of brigade members. The views he expressed and expressed with some force or vigour were listened to by both the day and night crews at the crucial change over time and those views were considered to be representative of the local brigade. There was an awareness at all times of the necessity to tie in the various fronts. There was criticism voiced in relation to the decision of Mr. Brill to evacuate his team. Superintendent Hoadley answered those concerns or criticisms very succinctly in that the area in which he and his team were deployed was rough country, the access trails were not very wide, he was the Senior Officer on the ground and there was a ready acceptance that Mr. Brill evacuated for Safety Reasons and Safety must always be the primary consideration.

Mr. Gough from the Belmore Station was an impressive witness not because of his formal fire fighting qualifications, indeed he conceded that he did not have patches or badges on his shirt but what he did have was experience, extensive experience and an intimate knowledge of the prevailing terrain. At one point he said that history repeats itself so far as the park and fire management strategies are concerned. The speed of the fire, he conceded, always catches you by surprise. From that vast fire fighting experience Mr. Gough conceded that "we tend to lose control when Forty Four's are on!" In the interval between the First and Second Section 44's Mr. Gough, and no doubt his fellow landholders/Firefighters appeared to accept the assurances of NPWS that they were looking after the extinguishment of the initial fire. Specifically in relation to the decision taken by NPWS late on the evening of the first night not to deploy fighting resources in the rough terrain, Mr. Gough, no doubt on behalf of his unit or team offered the opinion "We'd have gone in regardless!"

The National Parks and Wildlife Service had a draft Management Plan for the Goobang National Park (Ex 15). Mr. Porch was not able to assist whether in point of fact there had been any Prescribed Burns in the preceding 18 years. He was able to confirm that for a variety of reasons there had not been a prescribed burn in the Autumn of 2001.

Assistant Commissioner Howe was able to assist the Inquiry with his experience in what he termed the "Pilliga" Experience. He attentively listened to many aspects of the evidence and supporting documentation, reports, maps etc. Almost his initial statement to the Inquiry was "I've heard this story before!" In some detail he then outlined what he termed the Pilliga Fire Management Plan and its emphasis on the Total Fire threat. It was his view that this successful strategy had been implemented and the problems disappeared and disappeared to the satisfaction of the broader community. The key to the success of the Plan is a Buy-In by local landholders. Before problems arise the Bush Fire Management committee determines What should happen. Who should do what. When the Fire Control Centre should be set up and where the Forward Control Centres should be. Who manages those centres. There was an emphasis under this plan for strong local knowledge and for participation in the I.M. Team. On the aspect of training the Asst Commissioner emphasised the importance of an overall appreciation or understanding of the I.C.S. and where everybody fits into the system.

A document which I have not referred to earlier is Exhibit 8 a document prepared by the Captain of the Washpen Brigade reporting on, or commenting on, the initial Goobang Fire and which was received within time to be considered in the context of the Fire De-Brief. No where in the De-briefing document (Exhibit 21) is reference made to this document or the views expressed by the Captain. Point 5 in that report is in these terms:

It has become apparent to our brigade members that many National Parks and Wildlife Service staff do not know what is required to satisfactorily mop-up a fire's perimeter. This was certainly the case at Claggers Creek trail initially.

Certainly within a couple of days of this report NPWS dis-continued or suspended patrols or blackening out of the Fire affected areas and the concerns of Mr.

Kerin, and presumably brigade members were realised with re-ignition within the park during the lull or suspension in patrols.

The submissions, indeed criticisms made on behalf of the Farmers Federation, specifically targeting the NPWS are many and varied. It is submitted that no urgency attached to prescribed burning within the park whatever the circumstances. That the attitude displayed by the Service is said to be not responsible in a High Burn Fire Hazard. Prescribed burns, in the submission of the Federation, would significantly reduce the incidence of Spot Overs. The Coroner is asked to make a recommendation that prescribed burns are conducted within this particular National Park at least every five years.

Respecting the December 3rd Fire even accepting the confusing co-ordinates provided to the ground crew, there was available to the service the Satellite Imaging Pictures pin pointing the Fire. Additionally the decision taken to simply walk out on that evening was inappropriate. This submission is said to be supported by not only Supt Hoaldley but also by the Washpen Brigade. It is submitted that had the Brigade been informed that NPWS proposed doing nothing then they would have gone in and addressed the Fire. If the response time had been timely then there remained a realistic chance of containment. The Coroner is asked to make a recommendation in terms of what Counsel referred to as the bleeding obvious. Attack a Fire As Soon as Possible. If not then inform the rural Fire Service and the Local Brigade.

On the grant of the Section 44 Order the NPWS is criticised for taking of the order of five hours to provide a situation report, necessitating that the R.F.S. re-invent the Wheel.

On the aspect of mopping up following the First Fire it is submitted that what NPWS did was inadequate in both the considered views of Supt Hoaldley and the Local Brigade, the latter advising or recommending two to three tankers two to three times daily. When Mr. Porch took his RDO nothing was done by the NPWS. At this juncture the Local Brigade Capt had already faxed through his concerns at the inadequacy of the mopping up procedures. The fact that this aspect appears nowhere in the de brief and no steps were taken following the raising of those concerns is submitted to be nothing short of reprehensible. The Coroner is asked to recommend that NPWS staff have training in appropriate mopping up procedures and in the event of fires in the future that appropriate patrolling be conducted.

As for the Fire or the one on 17th December it is submitted the evidence is all one way - re-ignition occurring within the area considered blacked out.

The recommendation of the Asst Commissioner for far as the Pilliga Project are strongly supported by members of the Federation.

The Submissions on behalf of the NPWS commence with the trite observation that the Court cannot enjoy the wisdom of hindsight. The prevailing conditions were extreme and the decisions made had to be made and made quickly. It is inappropriate to speculate on a different outcome in the context of this Inquiry. The NPWS insists, and no doubt rightly that it has an over-riding responsibility to its personnel to work

safely and responsibly. Irrespective of whatever views might be advanced by the Washpen brigade and others the court is asked to find that placing people on the ground in a remote area late at night was not responsible. It cannot be suggested that NPWS did not respond, rather they did albeit at co-ordinates that were at the very least misleading or inaccurate. The event per se is characterised as catastrophic and the court ought refrain from determining what level of criticism can be levelled at who or which agency.

It is relevant from the NPWS submissions that Forensic Services did not make a definitive finding as to cause of the Dec 17th fire. The questions are posed. Who knows when it happened? Who knows when it occurred? It might have been between 3rd and 8th December, 2001!

If it be accepted that the tree was the cause of the second fire can the NPWS be criticised for missing it, missing it in daylight? Even if an inspection were to have been carried out during the absence of Mr. Porch. If Fire Fighting is not a precise science can any criticism be levelled at NPWS for missing perhaps one smouldering tree and a few smoking logs?

The NPWS does not support Prescribed Burns programmed at least every five years. The decision when and if to burn always remains with the Local Bush Fire Committee and subject to weather conditions.

The initial submission on behalf of the Rural Fire Service RFS is that each person, each Agency has as its common interest the control and management of large fires. The RFS acknowledges the concerns of local land holders as to the lack of consultation during the operation of the Section 44's. It is submitted that there be no finding that there was a lack of consultation so far as the approach to the fires is concerned. It was emphasised that in any situation where a Section 44 Order is operating there will inevitably be a loss of Local Control. It is because of the inability to control a fire at a local level that triggers the provisions of section 44, then it becomes a centralised control situation and it is emphasised that on 20th December, 2001 I.M.T. had two major fires under its control or supervision.

Addressing the comments or criticisms levelled at Mr. Porch of NPWS, the RFS submits that he was accepted as the representative of the local community, land holding community, on friendly terms with most if not all affected land holders and the plan he put forward was accepted by the Fire Controllers. No where in the evidence or supporting material can it be suggested that the continuation of the back burn and the necessity to tie in was other than entirely appropriate.

Flowing from the Goobang Fire the recommendations so far as utilising local aircraft have been adopted and implemented.

The RFS does not shy away from the communication problems. Peak Hill was described as completely inadequate for the task, too small and ill sighted.

Before coming to cause and origin of the Fires and any consequential recommendations let me say a number of things. I express the gratitude of the court to

the Investigative Teams, not only Strike Force Tronto on the assembling of the bricks of evidence but also to the close co-operation and assistance given them by relevant Agencies, RFS, NPWS, Local Councils, as well as the local community without whose practical and tireless efforts these fires had the potential to result in loss of life and Inquests.

On a number of issues or aspects the court will quite deliberately NOT be making any recommendations or indeed adverse findings.

Fire Trail widths and turn facilities along such trails was clearly an issue. A very late submission received from NPWS after submissions in Wellington Local Court flags that this whole issue of Trail Classifications and minimum widths is being addressed, not just in the Goobang Park. If I may quote from that submission "...the Policy Standing Committee of the Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee is currently developing a policy on fire trails. The policy deals with the identification, construction, maintenance and recording of fire trails. It proposes that fire trails be identified in one of three categories - primary fire trail secondary fire trail and dormant fire trail. The standard of construction and maintenance of the trails will vary according to the category of trail and according to guidelines being developed by the Co-ordinating Committee. Once adopted by the Bush Fire Co-ordinating committee, the local District Bush Fire Management Committees will be required to assign all trails across all tenures within their district to one of the three trail classifications. Therefore, all trails with Goobang National Park will be classified according to the system being developed by the Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee and will be required to meet the standards set for that particular classification..." That proposal does not, apparently stipulate 10 metres, 20 metres or eight metres. The submission does envisage the standards being completed quote early 2003. The standard will, as the submission is understood have State wide application and uniformity, it being incumbent on the local Bush Fire Management Committee to adopt and classify the various trails, fire trails. Absent any definitive resolution by the start of the Bush Fire Season, next year, 2003, I would propose making recommendations so far as Goobang is concerned, both in terms of trail classifications within the Park and the construction and maintenance of such trails. At this stage and for these reasons the Inquiry will with-hold making specific recommendations touching the various aspects of Fire Trails within the Goobang National Park.

There will be no adverse finding on the decision taken by Mr. Brills to evacuate his team when he did. An onerous responsibility rests on any team leader to assess the situation and make value judgments at the time. I lost count of the number of occasions throughout this Inquiry where the word 'extreme' was used in the context of the fires. What others might or would have done with the benefit of hindsight is irrelevant. Mr. Brill obviously placed a very high priority on personal and crew safety in extreme conditions and he must be commended on that action. The RFS itself has no higher priority in any situation than the safety of its own firefighters.

There will be no adverse finding nor criticism of the decision, conscious decision taken by officers of the NPWS to not deploy its fire crews in inhospitable rough, remote terrain in the dead of night but rather commence operations first thing in the morning. Again, the view was expressed that others would not have been deterred

and action taken sooner rather than later is always preferable. Through no fault of NPWS there had been a timely response to a fire report. Regrettably the co-ordinates placed the ground crew quite some distance from the area of concern on 3rd December, 2001.

There is a lingering issue so far as the Fire within the Gonbang National Park is concerned that activated or triggered the second or further Section 44 Order. The Captain of the Washpen Brigade no doubt expressing views of fellow Fire fighters communicated to the authorities certain issues relevant to so called Mopping up operations conducted by personnel of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Whether that was seen fit to be, or was in fact an issue raised or discussed in the context of the de-brief following the initial Section 44 Order and the mopping up blackening out operations the inescapable finding has to be made that there were concerns as to the competence or level of skill being demonstrated by officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service specifically by firefighters, members of the Rural Fire Service, in the matter of total extinguishment of the Fire. Views abound as to the level of surveillance that should operate in such a situation. It matters not whether multiple crews or units operating on a number of times throughout the day, or a single unit operating once daily to oversight the total extinguishment of the fire. The clear fact has to be that the National Parks and Wildlife service made the decision to either abandon or suspend its daily patrols, when its Officer was required to take Rostered Days Off or Scheduled Leave. It was in this hiatus that observations were made of smoke emanating from within the boundaries of the National Park, smoke which lead to significant fires and activating or triggering a further Section 44 Declaration. There is every indication that had patrols continued even at the level deemed appropriate by the Service itself, then the extent of the fire and the timely confrontation, or fighting of the fire, would have resulted in significantly less destruction of property and considerably less utilisation of resources human and otherwise.

What I shall call the Claggers Creek Fire commenced within the National Park as a result of lighting strike, a not dis-similar situation to what occurred on Belmore Station. This Fire broke out in the Wandawondong Sector of the National Park as a consequence of lighting strike. I mention specifically the gride references 0624000 and 6388700 because the subsequent fire is determined to be within grid references 0625233 and 6387045. Investigators cannot with any degree of precision determine the cause of the December 17th fire. However what is abundantly clear from a variety of independent sources is the continuing or lingering smoke emanating from within the Park and at a time when patrols were being conducted by the Park Service conducting so called Mopping up operations. The outbreak co-incided with a cessation or postponment of the patrols by the Park Service.

Flowing from these Fires Inquiries it is appropriate to make recommendations.

They are in these terms:-

That the Councils of Blayney, Cabonne and Orange in conjunction with the Rural Fire Service of New South Wales expedite the construction of an appropriate Canobolas Fire Management Centre as a matter of Urgency. (This

recommendation extends to both the Goobang National Park Fires as well as the Eugowra Fire 108 of 2002)

That there be established a mobile Telephone Repeater in the Goobang National Park to service the community and to provide additional communications during fires.

That a Draft Bush Fire Management Plan under the Rural Fire Service Act be prepared by all relevant Bush Fire Management committees for the entire Goobang National Park and all surrounding lands and presented to the Canobolas Bush Fire Management committee for Adoption.

That the National Parks and Wildlife Service through the Canobolas Bush Fire Management Committee review trails in the National Park to ensure appropriate refuge and turning areas for future fire fighting activities. Such review to be in addition to the adoption by the Bush Fire Management Committee of the identification, construction, maintenance and recording of fire trails generally.

That the Rural Fire Service Brigades request that the National Parks and Wildlife service attend the meetings of brigades in the Goobang National Park area and to develop an understanding and relationship between the various agencies.

That the National Parks and Wildlife Service Fire Management Manual be made available to the Rural Fire Service for distribution to districts for integration into the co-ordinated fire Fighting System.

In relation to the Forbes Road, Eugowra Fire concerns were expressed in several quarters at the decision to cut the supply of power to the district. This was a considered decision and it inevitably impacted adversely on landowners, particularly in their capacity to pump water during the emergency. This Inquiry is satisfied that this decision placed a higher priority on the safety of fire fighting personnel and public safety generally and no criticism can be justly levelled at the Authority responsible for this decision.

FINDINGS:

I find that on 20th December, 2001 bushland and other property situated at Forbes Road, Eugowra in the State of New South Wales was destroyed by fire, such fire having two separate points of origin near the waste disposal depot in Forbes Road. The Evidence does not allow the Inquiry to say who set the fire or how it was set. (Schedule of property annexed)

I find that on 24th December, 2001 bushland and other property situated at and near Warburton Stud, Two Mile Flat via Mudgee, in the State of New South Wales was destroyed by fire, such fire having started along the roadway near "Binda" property. (See attached schedule) There are no suspicious circumstances.

I find that on 3rd December, 2001 bushland and other property situated in and near the Goobang National Park, Eugowra in the State of New South Wales was destroyed by fire, such fire having started from a lightning strike within the National park. After containment or extinguishment the fire re-ignited on 17th December, 2001 destroying bush and other property. (set out in annexed schedule) There are no suspicious circumstances.