

Revised

JUNE 15, 2003

Federal Member for Hume
Mr Alby Shultz MP
191 Auburn Street
GOULBURN NSW 2580



Dear Mr Shultz,

RE SUBMISSION FOR NATIONAL FIRE ENQUIRY

Please consider these points which I have put together from my experiences over the past twelve months.

I am a Senior Deputy Captain of the Alpine Aylmerton Rural Fire Brigade in the Wingecarribee Shire & have been a member of this Brigade for 24 years & Senior Deputy for the past 12 years.

I believe as a whole the Rural Fire Service is a world class professional fire service & does its job of protecting life & property extremely well as demonstrated on many occasions.

1. However, it is the beaurocracy & hierarchy of this Service which is making the Service too top heavy with paper shufflers & pen pushers justifying their jobs with stupid amounts of meaningless paper work expected to be read by volunteers each week. One example is the paper work which must be submitted to have a hazard reduction approved with hours of work necessary to complete. This means that a lot of essential hazard reduction will not be done as volunteers lack the spare time to complete this mountain of paper work.

2. Our Brigade was sent to a neighbouring shires to assist with fire fighting (Wollongong) to find that there was no threat to property. We were sitting around with approx 25 other fire appliances & a fire broke out in our shire (November 9, 2002, Willow Vale). We made a phone call to our control to request our release to return home. Our control centre phoned State Operations to request our release & were told we could not return as we were needed at Wollongong. Following one hour of at times, very heated phone calls between us & our control we advised control to advise State Ops to release us or we were leaving anyway. The message was we would be released when Picton RFS arrived to replace us. We left immediately anyway & passed Picton at Wilton. On our trip back the radio message from our control was to respond under lights & sirens as homes & property were being lost. As you are aware this fire destroyed over 50% of our own brigadec arca, 3 homes and many buildings were lost. On our arrival to the Aylmerton area our brigade went to work to save as many homes as we could. We were the only fire unit for over 1 1/2 hours in our brigade area as all our other brigades were battling in the

Willow Vale Braemar areas. We only lost two homes & several sheds in the Aylmerton before help from NSW Fire Brigades arrived. This fire burnt to the walls of our own fire station & we were stunned to see it still standing on our return. At this time the Task Force of trucks that we were with at Wollongong arrived to help. Maybe the "powers that be" should have listened to our first phone call & request to return to our area.

3. The hierarchy of the RFS need to listen & ask advise sooner of the Brigade with the local knowledge. This also came out in this fire with decisions being made with no consultation from our Captain who is a lifetime resident of the area & has been with the Brigade for 50 years.

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4. A statement made by the ACT Fire Brigade that the Rural Fire Service would have been of no benefit in the suburbs fighting structural fires as they have no training in this area is not valid. This might be so in the ACT but in NSW RFS, ie Wingecarribee Shire, all our brigades are trained in Village Firefighter which is a National Standard Structural Fire Fighting course. We also have five brigades trained to a National Standard & carrying Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus. Our brigade has a Cat 2 Fire Tanker which is fitted with Breathing Apparatus & all bush & structural fire fighting equipment & a Cat 10 pumper which also carries Breathing Apparatus & other specialised structural fire fighting equipment. In the past twelve months our Brigade attended 81 incidents including MVA, structural & bush fires & other emergency incidents & has the training to handle any fire situation. Help should have been requested earlier & maybe many homes may have been saved.

5. There should be no state boundaries in the event of any future disasters as this is still one country & we are all here to help each other. Therefore better planning by governments should be put in place.

Thank you for your time & your very public support. I would be more than happy to discuss any aspect of this submission with you by phone or in person.

Yours sincerely



Mark Cupitt