



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(Reference: [Review of Auditor-General's Report No 5 of 2013:
Bushfire Preparedness](#))

Members:

MR B SMYTH (Chair)
MS M PORTER (Deputy Chair)
MS N LAWDER
MS Y BERRY

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2014

Secretary to the committee:
Dr A Cullen (Ph: 620 50142)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2 pm.

COOPER, DR MAXINE, Auditor-General

STANTON, MR BRETT, Director, Performance Audits, Auditor-General's Office

BROWN, MR JONATHAN, Senior Auditor, Performance Audits, Auditor-General's Office

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome, auditor and your staff, to this public hearing of the public accounts committee inquiry into Auditor-General's report No 5 of 2013, bushfire preparedness. I declare the hearing open. In accordance with the committee's resolution of appointment, all reports of the Auditor-General stand referred to the public accounts committee after presentation. The public accounts committee has established procedures for the examination of the referred Auditor-General's reports and the committee considered Auditor-General's report No 5 of 2013 in accordance with these procedures and resolved to inquire further into the audit report.

The committee's terms of reference are the information contained within the audit report. Whilst the terms of reference for the inquiry will be the information contained within the report, the committee's inquiry specifically is focusing on three areas: one, elements underpinning strategic readiness for bushfire prevention and preparedness; two, the farm firewise program; and three, implementation of audit recommendations.

On behalf of the committee I welcome you and your staff from the audit for attending today. The committee will suspend this part of the hearing at approximately 3 o'clock and then resume at 3.30 to hear from witnesses representing the North Canberra Community Council.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the blue-coloured card on the table before you. Could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Cooper: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Cooper. I also remind witnesses that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. A copy will be provided for your consideration. Auditor-General, would you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Cooper: Yes, I would. Thank you very much. I will take the opportunity to outline for the committee's benefit the conclusions of the bushfire preparedness audit report and present the six high-priority recommendations. There were 24 recommendations. However, I will only focus on the six high-priority ones. The audit commenced in August 2012 and concluded with the tabling in July 2013.

The overall conclusion was that the ACT government's bushfire prevention and preparedness activities are informed by legislation and strategic and operational plans. They involve activities to manage fuel loads and develop infrastructure to assist in

suppressing bushfires, engage with and raise awareness within the community and maintain a bushfire firefighting capacity. While this approach positions the ACT government and community to meet the challenge of living in an environment that will inevitably have bushfires, there are shortcomings which present a risk to their effectiveness.

This overall conclusion was based on conclusions and key findings specifically related to five areas: bushfire governance arrangements, planning processes and plans that guide bushfire preparedness, Territory and Municipal Services Directorate bushfire management activities, community engagement and preparation for bushfire threat. These five areas of consideration are presented in the bushfire preparedness report No 5 as discrete chapters.

With respect to bushfire governance arrangements, chapter 2, it was considered that the ACT government has a robust governance and planning framework for its bushfire management activities, and this includes the Emergencies Act 2004, the strategic bushfire management plan, regional fire management plans and bushfire operational plans. While there is a robust governance and planning framework, it was found that strategic and accountability indicators for the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, particularly the Emergency Services Agency and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate, needed to be reviewed. Indicators need to be developed so that it is clear exactly what is being measured.

The conclusion regarding planning processes and plans that guide bushfire preparedness, which is in chapter 3, was that while these provide a sound basis for bushfire management and are an improvement on what was in place prior to the 2003 bushfires, there are shortcomings which impair their effectiveness. Specifically with respect to the strategic bushfire management plan, while it generally meets legislative requirements, it did not, however, have a list of privately owned assets of public interest vulnerable to bushfire and did not have a statement of resources needed to meet the objectives of the plan. There are security reasons why it may not be appropriate to have a public list of privately owned assets. However, these should be known by the Emergency Services Agency.

With respect to the other issue, there are no reasons for not having a statement of resources in the strategic bushfire management plan. Monitoring of the strategic bushfire management plan's implementation was inadequate, as the required auditing and compliance activity was not undertaken.

With respect to the regional fire management plans, they had not been reviewed regularly to reflect changes in land use. It is important that these plans are updated so that they can better inform the development of the bushfire operational plans.

The bushfire operational plans should be prepared at least every two years to guide fuel management and other activities to manage the threat of bushfires. While the largest land manager, the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate which manage around 72 per cent of the territory, update their bushfire operational plan annually, such plans are not produced by all other land managers. There is a need to clarify who should prepare such plans.

Importantly, there is a need to clarify the requirements of rural lessees for fire management under land management agreements and the farm firewise program. Land management agreements are administered by the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate and have a legislative base. farm firewise is a voluntary program fostered by the Emergency Services Agency.

With respect to bushfire operational plans, while several recommendations were made, a high-priority recommendation, recommendation 7, was that the emergency services should specify preparation and approval requirements for bushfire operational plans, particularly those for lands in the bushfire abatement zone. Furthermore, the strategic bushfire management plan identified a high priority being the development of a framework for bushfire management activities on national lands. This framework had not been developed. However, there were cooperative efforts between the Emergency Services Agency and some national land managers.

With respect to the ACT Bushfire Council, it did not have terms of reference at the beginning of the audit. This was corrected during the audit. The council had not prepared annual audit reports in compliance with the strategic bushfire management plan as required under this plan. Furthermore, its annual report on bushfire preparedness, although welcomed by the minister, was not always available by the beginning of the bushfire season.

The audit considered the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate's bushfire management activities in chapter 4. As this agency is the land manager for some of the most strategically important areas from a bushfire perspective—and, as previously stated, it manages around 72 per cent of the territory—Territory and Municipal Services undertook significant bushfire management activities. While it generally met all of its legislative requirements, its reporting on progress on its implementation of bushfire operations or plans would be more effective if it specified how all its activities affected the implementation of the government's main strategic planning documents—that is, the strategic bushfire management plan and the regional fire management plans.

There is also need for the directorate to have its financial information in its bushfire operational plan reconciled with the directorate's financial management system. Furthermore, there were some significant delays of several years and significant cost increases regarding the upgrade of a major strategic road, Mount Franklin Road. Given the importance of such major capital works projects, a high-priority recommendation is recommendation 14, that the Emergency Services Agency, the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate should strengthen across-government delivery of major projects in the strategic bushfire management plan and regional fire management plans by selectively doing four things: monitoring the effect of some amendments in 2011 to the Planning and Development Act and identifying if any additional changes are needed; improving information sharing; finalising the pre-appraisal procedure; and holding an annual forward planning session for capital works.

The management of threat of bushfires is a shared responsibility involving community members and the ACT government. Given this, with respect to community engagement, which is the subject of chapter 5 of the audit report, it was concluded

that requirements for and expectations of the ACT rural community with respect to bushfire preparedness are unclear and the Emergency Services Agency and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate have limited oversight of the bushfire management activities of rural leaseholders. This presents a risk that some strategic areas may not be effectively managed.

As was previously mentioned, there is a need to clarify the requirements of rural lessees for fire management under land management agreements and the farm firewise program. This was the subject of two recommendations with a high-priority recommendation, recommendation 15, being that the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate in consultation with the Emergency Services Agency should improve its management of land management agreements with respect to rural leaseholders' fire management responsibility by doing four things: maintaining an up-to-date record of current land management agreements; undertaking timely reviews of land management agreements at least every five years; clarifying responsibility for identifying and monitoring bushfire risk through land management agreements; and specifying bushfire management requirements in land management agreements as required by the Emergencies Act 2004 and the strategic bushfire plan and aligning these with any requirements under the farm firewise program.

That recommendation complements recommendation 16 about farm firewise. Furthermore, there are opportunities to enhance engagement with groups in the ACT's urban community, including, for example, those working or living in ember zones who may benefit from information specifically targeted towards them.

The audit considered the preparation for bushfire threats, which is our final chapter, chapter 6, and, in so doing, considered the resources available for bushfire suppression, ACT Rural Fire Service capability, management information, readiness for suppression, whole-of-government emergency response and public warnings.

While there are continuous improvements being made to facilitate a better response to bushfires, there are shortcomings. Over half—three of the six—of the high-priority recommendations are related to the preparation for bushfire threats. In relation to the ACT Rural Fire Service brigades, it was recommended, recommendation 18, that the Emergency Services Agency and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate should continue to improve working arrangements between the ACT Rural Fire Service, Parks Brigade and the ACT Rural Fire Service headquarters by doing two things: firstly, documenting the responsibilities of the Parks and Conservation Service branch in its land management role versus its Parks Brigade role and conveying this to all brigades; and secondly, updating or replacing the emergency services and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate 2007 memorandum of understanding to guide working arrangements for bushfire preparedness and suppression.

With respect to the strategic bushfire capability, it was recommended, recommendation 19, that the Emergency Services Agency and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate should develop and routinely review a strategic bushfire capability for the ACT. The contribution of ACT Fire & Rescue, including the community fire units and the ACT Rural Fire Service, including Parks Brigade, should be explicitly stated.

In relation to competency, training and incident management team capability, the high-priority recommendation, recommendation 20, is that the emergency services should—I will go through these; they go to (e)—(a) review the ACT Rural Fire Service’s target for its members holding recognised units of competency and the time frame for achieving the target level of competency; (b) review its training and development activities in order to meet its model of service and the Rural Fire Service’s contribution towards the ACT’s strategic bushfire capability, taking into account, of course, the level of cross-crewing that is feasible; (c) continue liaising and collaborating where possible with the Parks Brigade over the brigade’s planning and implementation of training and development activity; (d) prepare and maintain medium-term training and development plans for the ACT Rural Fire Service; and (e) determine a target for incident management team capability and identify how this will be achieved.

To conclude, I would particularly like to thank our auditees for their very high level of cooperation and support, in particular the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and within that, of course, the Emergency Services Agency. I would also like to thank the other auditee, the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate.

We had an independent expert, Ms Narelle Rawnsley, and I would like to thank her for her insights. I would also like to thank the whole audit team, particularly two of the members, Mr Brett Stanton and Mr Jonathan Brown.

Questions, Mr Chair and committee members.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Cooper. Could you detail what you consider to be the six high-priority recommendations? I am not sure I caught them all?

Dr Cooper: Yes, that is fine. The six high-priority recommendations are: recommendation 14 on page 29; then we have recommendation 15 on page 30; we have recommendation 18, page 32; recommendation 19, page 33; and lastly recommendation 20, page 34. One more is recommendation 7 on page 26.

MS PORTER: So 7, 14, 15, 16, 19 and 20.

Dr Cooper: I think that is it. Half of those are in chapter 6.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we could start at recommendation 7, the preparation and approval of the bushfire operational plans. What are your particular concerns there?

Dr Cooper: The bushfire operational plans—let me just get that in the text, if I may, Mr Chair. Various sections of legislation require the preparation of these. Our major concern under that particular one relates to which land managers should prepare which particular plans. That is an issue. I am actually going to refer that over to Mr Brown.

Mr Brown: There appears to be uncertainty about who should prepare bushfire operational plans. There is much in chapters 3, 4 and 5 about bushfire operational plans. They are, of course, the action plans that enable the strategy to be implemented. Setting aside the largest bushfire operational plan—the TAMS bushfire operational

plan—we could provide a long list of difficulties. But, in essence, here are the main ones: the ESA—the Emergency Services Agency—and, specifically, the Rural Fire Service has not given sufficient attention to the other bushfire operational plans. It focuses primarily, and usually exclusively, on the TAMS bushfire operational plan.

It does not focus on what is needed, from whom, how they are to be brought forward and whether their implementation needs to be monitored when it comes to any other bushfire operational plans. In other words, is the legislation and is the strategic bushfire management plan exclusively about TAMS and its land management responsibilities through its BOP or does that legislation indicate that there is a need for bushfire operational plans from other land managers? Our interpretation is that the legislation is clear in that it does go further than just the TAMS bushfire operational plan.

In essence, this recommendation is suggesting to the Emergency Services Agency that they should make sure that it is clear to any land managers involved in land management within the territory what their obligations are with respect to bushfire operational plans. It is not just TAMS that has an obligation to produce a bushfire operational plan.

What is more, the recommendation also seeks to set out what the expectations are for, and what support would be available, to other government land managers other than TAMS when it comes to bringing forward these bushfire operational plans. They are clearly an essential part of the strategic framework. How should they be brought forward? Who should bring them forward? How should that process be supported? For example, national land managers, rural leaseholders, rural leaseholders within the bushfire abatement zone, which is a subset of all rural leaseholders. All these expectations do not come through particularly clearly when you consider the Emergencies Act and the strategic bushfire management plan. So the recommendation seeks to clarify where those responsibilities sit.

THE CHAIR: Is it the intention of paragraphs 346 and 347 that that be done in legislation?

Dr Cooper: I do not consider it necessary to be done in legislation, but it needs to be documented and clearly available as to the expectations.

Mr Stanton: What that section of the report in chapter 3—paragraph 3.39 onwards—seeks to convey is that the SBMP is a document tabled in the Assembly and there is the Emergencies Act 2004. Between those two documents there is that lack of clarity and ambiguity in some aspects.

THE CHAIR: The government's response has agreed with the recommendation. It suggests the ESA will deliver a framework. We have both ministers in over the coming weeks. What is it particularly that the committee should be looking for in what the government does to rectify this situation?

Dr Cooper: I think it is around looking at the total coverage that the emergency services consider necessary for the fire protection of the ACT. So that is really a question for the commissioner—that all the key lands are covered by some form of

bushfire operational plan.

It could be positioned that firewise and LMAs are a mechanism to achieve the outcome. But I think, as we have highlighted in this report, there are problems with both of those. One is voluntary and the one that is not voluntary is actually not effectively managed.

MS PORTER: I have a question about the other kinds of plans that sit underneath those plans which are to do with the emergency response of people. Did you examine those at all in doing this?

Dr Cooper: We did in terms of communication. But I do not see them as sitting under; I see them as sitting complementary.

MS PORTER: Beside.

Dr Cooper: Yes. I will ask Mr Stanton to address that.

Mr Stanton: Yes, that is right. Chapter 3 talks about, I suppose, what we describe as the governance documents, the governance plans: the strategic bushfire management plan, regional fire management plans and the bushfire operational plans that set a framework for managing the potential threat of bushfires. Chapter 6 goes into some detail in relation to those more operational plans.

MS PORTER: As we all know, the response by people in 2003 was quite problematic in a number of areas and interfered with the operation of some professionals trying to carry out their work initially and then even into the future, in the recovery stage. Is there anything in here that talks about how we are doing in relation to making sure that we have all the right plans, whatever you would like to call them, in place to make sure that the situation improves next time? Is there something existing in here that is going to take care of that as we respond each year to the bushfire season? We know that we are coming up to one now, and we will be facing that all over again.

Dr Cooper: This audit focuses on preparedness; it does not focus on post fire.

MS PORTER: No. With respect, I am talking about preparedness. Are we prepared to be able to manage that?

Dr Cooper: The framework is clearly there. The communication systems are clearly there. In terms of some of the issues, there were some shortcomings. In terms of communication, Mr Stanton, could you outline the test in communication that we found wanting.

Mr Stanton: In the latter part of chapter 6, from about paragraph 6.110 onwards, we talk about the public warnings and emergency communication processes that are set up in preparation for such an event. We go into some detail about the emergency alert system and some of the public warning mechanisms that the ESA has put in place.

We make one recommendation—recommendation 24, the last one—just in relation to

some enhancements to the testing regime over some of those communication methods. That is focused on providing that information to the public, I suppose, in the event that there is a bushfire threat.

Dr Cooper: But with the communication, we clearly identified that there were a wide range of communication channels in the event of an incident. These are channels that are used in emergencies, not just for bushfire. So we have outlined those. Also, the focus is on single point of truth—the SPOT approach so that there is a consistent message. All of those are strengths in the communication. It was just around that particular issue of re-testing. If all of those fail and then if they went to the government system of communication, that is not tested, the latter one. Maybe it is worth a test pre the fire season.

MS BERRY: I am only new to this; so I am still getting my head around the report. As far as preparedness goes, I was interested in the work that audit had done around preparedness, I guess, about rural firefighting teams and their training and recruitment. Basically, the government has responded and agreed to pretty much all of the submissions. But I wondered in respect of this one, in your assessment, were there things that—maybe you could just take me through what you thought about this. I know there are different areas, but could you stick to the Rural Fire Service. I am looking at the graph.

Dr Cooper: Ms Berry, what page are you on?

MS BERRY: Page 130.

Dr Cooper: Let us go to that and walk you through that. I will start off and then my colleague Jonathan, who I do credit with some very in-depth analysis, may wish to engage particularly, for instance, around the brigades. In terms of readiness, there were two fundamental pre-season issues for the audit: one was around the fitness of the firefighters and the appliance checks. So how fit are the humans and is the appliance ready to go?

MS BERRY: Both very important things.

Dr Cooper: Yes. In respect of fitness tests for firefighters in 6.81, the need is clearly set out but its implementation was loose. We know what is required, but did they actually turn up and do the tests? It was pretty loose. Equipment tests were not clearly set out and the implementation was loose. On one, you have got a clear statement of what is required. As the Emergency Services Agency told us, other jurisdictions do not actually require pre-season tests, but the ACT does; so that is a plus. But having required that, it is pretty loosely implemented.

In respect of equipment, we identified that there was not a clearly established protocol for testing that and, therefore, it was loose. Turning to investment in training, the Rural Fire Service is steadily improving the number of roles in skills shortage areas but lacks firm commitment to accredited units of competency models and there is limited capability to achieve cross-crewing between brigades, even though the resourcing model depends on this. In respect of the parks brigades, more training and development is provided. The concept of operations plan identifies specific incident

management team roles but not what the requirement is.

It is certainly an area that is quite loose, but the really positive thing is we do require pre-training. Although it is loose, randomly, there was appliance checking. But it was not systematic or comprehensive. Mr Brown may like to add.

THE CHAIR: It is not page 130; it is actually on page 151 and 152.

MS BERRY: Yes, it goes through. I have got a different copy.

Dr Cooper: That is okay, we will take it all.

MS BERRY: You did the audit; you know where we are up to, right?

Dr Cooper: It was a year ago.

MS BERRY: Fair enough.

Dr Cooper: I still have to search for it.

Mr Brown: I think your reference to page 130 is a fair reference in terms of the role of RFS, because 130 talks about the role of RFS in relation to farm firewise. So this is not so much to do with suppression, which comes into chapter 6. We can go into a bit more detail on that, but certainly in chapter 5, page 130, we are outlining the role that the Rural Fire Service has in facilitating farm firewise. From your terms of reference, that is clearly something that you wanted to look at.

MS BERRY: Yes, we did.

Mr Brown: I do not know whether you want to talk about that now? I will. Dr Cooper made the comment in her introduction that farm firewise is, in essence, a consensual scheme. It is something that rural leaseholders are not obligated to undertake. They can engage, and it is the responsibility of the Emergency Services Agency to approach rural leaseholders and offer a facility to develop a farm firewise assessment. In essence, this farm firewise assessment is designed to be a bushfire operational plan. In other words, it is designed to satisfy the need for a BOP that comes from other parts of legislation—for example, the Planning and Development Act or the Emergencies Act.

We established that the Rural Fire Service is doing exactly what it should be doing. It is set out within the SBMP. It says that the ESA will provide a service to rural leaseholders to help develop a farm firewise assessment, and they are doing that.

We asked wider questions about the value of farm firewise. If it is only consensual—in other words, if it is up to the rural leaseholder to engage or not engage—does that satisfy the need for a BOP if it is purely an elective thing that they choose to do or not choose to do.

So we looked at the total population of rural leaseholders and established that only 68 per cent of rural leaseholders have a farm firewise plan. So on the basis that these

plans are designed to satisfy a requirement for a BOP, what about the other 32 per cent? Are they meeting the terms of the legislation? We do not know. The Rural Fire Service does not know. The commissioner does not know. So that was our observation—that farm firewise in itself is not achieving compliance with the legislation.

MS BERRY: Is information as to which rural leaseholders have consented to have a BOP public information, the 68 per cent?

Mr Brown: We understand the total population of rural leaseholders is around 160 to 170. Those were the figures given to us and which are in the report. I do not think we make the point in the report whether that information is publicly available. Which of those 160 to 170 have farm firewise plans is not publicly available. But we identified systems within the Emergency Services Agency to identify the 132 leaseholders who have farm firewise plans.

The other observation we make in chapter 5 about farm firewise is that the scheme has been in the ACT now for nine years and the numbers of farm firewise rural leaseholders have grown year on year. Some of the farm firewise plans, if they are the necessary way of complying with the legislation, are nine years old. Certainly a good proportion of them are over two years old. So there is a question mark about the value of those plans if they are up to nine years old.

MS BERRY: And if we are requiring all the government agencies to have at least two-yearly or, ideally, yearly plans.

Mr Brown: That is right. If the legislation talks about two-yearly BOPs, does a farm firewise plan that was developed eight years ago meet the terms of the legislation?

Dr Cooper: And also taking up their intersection with the land management agreements, the land management agreements are often out of date; they are not monitored. There are a whole lot of issues around land management agreements, and yet they are a legal basis for requiring certain activities of land management to occur. They seem to not be that effective. So we have made the recommendation about the intersection between the two needing to be sorted.

THE CHAIR: Is it your view, though, that it should be a compulsory part of the land management agreement?

Dr Cooper: I would leave that to the government to make a decision, but one of the questions you could ask, Mr Chair, is: if it is compulsory to manage weeds on your property, is it not equally important to manage the fuel loadings? So do it by analogy.

Mr Brown: Our understanding—I believe this is borne out in the report—is that the land management agreements already specify a requirement for something called a bushfire action plan. If you dig deeper and deeper, you may find reference to the same thing being called a bushfire operational plan. Whether we call them bushfire action plans or bushfire operational plans, the land management agreements as introduced in 2000 already provide an obligation. The question is whether a farm firewise plan addresses that obligation.

Dr Cooper: Then the other thing is it is not just a matter of having something in legislation; it is having the infrastructure that actually makes it meaningful and works so you get the outcome you are after. Land management agreements have been around a long time. They seem to be problematic for a whole host of reasons. If fire is a key issue, then is it the role of the Emergency Services Agency to make sure they have BOPs, or is it through land management agreement, which is currently administered by the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate?

THE CHAIR: So it would be wise to see the BOPs and the BAPs come together as whatever it is you want to call it?

Dr Cooper: And they are essentially our recommendations 15 and 16, which says, “Sort it, please.” It is audit’s role to identify the issue. We have clearly identified it. It is a significant issue—sort it. Of course, with the government’s response, they have agreed.

THE CHAIR: Yes, they are reviewing it.

Dr Cooper: And it may be in resolving this that there really is only room for one—either farm firewise or a land management agreement that clearly articulates the fire needs. Really, it is up to the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate and the Emergency Services Agency to see what would work functionally.

THE CHAIR: If we could go, then, to recommendation 2 about the strategic bushfire management plan having a statement of resources, you said in your introduction that you thought there was no reason for not having a comprehensive listing, and the government has said that it would be included as part of the development of the strategic bushfire management plan version 3, which has commenced. The SBMP 3, the draft, says that the resources required will be determined at the end of the process. What would you be looking for to be included in that statement of resources? It is on page 24.

Dr Cooper: In terms of resources, section 74 of the Emergencies Act requires a statement to be in that plan, as you said, Mr Smyth, and it requires an assessment to be undertaken of the plan on “available resources and capabilities after it is approved”. Then the statement is to be shared with the minister and the bushfire council. Three problems exist with this current system: unworkability of including such an assessment in the plan itself. What was actually done in 2009-10 was an assessment of additional resources, not total resources, and it was not shared with the bushfire council. You may have within the plan when it is approved an intent around resources, but what I think is needed is a confirmation, once it is approved, of what are the resources that will be dedicated. It might have to be a two-stage approach—indicative within the plan, but then specifically a confirmation once the plan is approved.

THE CHAIR: The current plan says words not dissimilar to what you have just said—that this is an ongoing process and ultimately it is dependent on financial resources available. Is that acceptable rather than having a comprehensive list as determined by the act?

Dr Cooper: Let us look at the history of this. Where in the report do we have our 51 appliances driving the resources? Chapter 6, let us go there. If we could go to page 161, section 6.49, it seems that there are 51 appliances that seem to drive the resourcing model that is then applied rather than looking at the need and doing it the other way. We think it should be based on the need. I guess it comes down to the commissioner for emergency services making a statement about “To meet the likely need under different scenarios, this is our capability.”

Mr Brown: This is one major component of the resource requirement. It is a subset of the point that you are raising, chair—in other words, chapter 6 and the discussion around a statement of strategic bushfire capability is very much a resourcing question: what resources do we need to achieve a given outcome? That would be a subset of the way the government or the ESA address the deficit as we see it at the moment in the SBMP. The question is about what you can put into the SBMP at an early stage at its approval in order to satisfy the terms of the legislation. Reading the legislation in its barest form, it requires a statement to be in the SBMP of resources needed to implement the plan. That is all we have to go on. What would you need to see in the SBMP to satisfy that? It suggests that there is something more detailed than a statement that, “We will do this.”

THE CHAIR: You say in the recommendation that an explicit statement of all resources is needed to meet the objectives of the plan. We had discussion of this in the Assembly, and the government, in their response, tabled a document that said, “We have a Rural Fire Service, we have a fire and emergency service, we have access to two helicopters and some graders.” Does that meet, in your view, the requirements of the act?

Dr Cooper: We are not legal people, so I would caution a response to that, but we would say it should be outcome focused. It is like for our individual health, at a particular stage, somebody says, “Well, you’re healthy or you’re not healthy or you need to do certain things.” In terms of managing our bushfire risk, the commissioner, I would imagine in his role, would be the person to say, “Given all the resourcing, I have this capability to meet certain conditions,” and to make it quite explicit.

THE CHAIR: That says, “I’ve got this resourcing to meet certain conditions.” So that is the resourcing driving the answer. But should it not be the other way around?

Dr Cooper: Sorry, to manage under those circumstances. I agree with you, sorry. The 51 should not drive the resourcing.

THE CHAIR: If it is a category 1 fire, we need this, if it is a category 2 fire, we need that.

Dr Cooper: Yes, and to know clearly if you have got gaps. If you take that approach, it may be we are over resourced. The audit did not try to make a major call. We looked at what was put there, and what was put there was a resource—the 51 appliances—determining the resourcing rather than, “Well, what are the likely scenarios to drive the resourcing base we need?” Our expert, Narelle Rawnsley, was certainly someone we used a fair amount to understand how this worked in other jurisdictions. As we say in 6.43, we use the “strategic bushfire capability” term here,

and “model of service” and “standard of fire cover” are other analogous terms in other jurisdictions.

THE CHAIR: If you refer to 6.3, have we determined what the standard of fire cover is?

Mr Brown: We looked very closely at this question. We wanted to establish what was needed, not what there is. We identified that some work had gone into the very same question in 2006 to determine what should be an appropriate level of standard of fire cover. We make the point in the report that that work was inconclusive. However, there is an area where such a statement has been made—that is, the Parks Brigade. They did precisely that modelled upon a response to the 2001 fires. They determined what weight of resource was necessary, and from that they modelled their requirements. So it is not true that there is no statement of capability across the full bushfire suppression resources. There is one area where it has been done, and that is in Parks Brigade.

THE CHAIR: The work that parks did, is that satisfactory in your view?

Mr Brown: We did not look through the detail of the methodology. It is a long time ago. We simply established that the methodology had been used.

Dr Cooper: Again, we would expect the Emergency Services Agency to provide some direction on whether that methodology was appropriate or not, as some auditing role themselves.

THE CHAIR: But if you go back to para 6.44, the emergency services has shied away from adopting a “standard of fire cover” and, instead, have used the term “strategic bushfire capability”. Are you happy with the use of that term? Do you think it equates to standard of fire cover or is it talking about something different? I can maintain a strategic bushfire capability, but it may be nowhere near what I need to provide the standard of fire cover. In its recommendation, should the committee be saying, “Well, let’s move to the standard of fire cover assessment?”

Mr Brown: This particular point finished up as a recommendation. We noted that the Emergency Services Agency had engaged with the recommendation and responded positively. I think that question may best be answered at a later date when we see what the response is.

Dr Cooper: But in the conversations I and the team had, I think those two terms were analogous. But it is all in the detail, as Mr Brown has just said.

THE CHAIR: The response from the government to recommendation 19 about the strategic bushfire capability says the SBMP, the ACT territory-wide risk assessment, and the concept of operations for bushfires and grassfires provide guidance by which the requirements for a strategic bushfire capability can be undertaken. But, as you said, it is in the detail. It is easy to say, “Yes, we’ve got a concept and we’ve got guidance and we’re working towards strategic bushfire capability,” but whether you actually get there is a different story.

MS PORTER: I am interested in the commentary about the CFUs that you have in here; there seems to be a lot about not enough documentation.

Dr Cooper: Could you give us the page number?

MS PORTER: Sorry; I was looking for it before.

Mr Stanton: It is the latter part of chapter 5. The discussion on community fire units commences at paragraph 5.91 and goes through to the end of that chapter.

MS PORTER: Yes. It talks about the inconsistent documentation associated with training, equipment and members. Did you find that different CFUs had different riding instructions?

Mr Stanton: In essence, there was a lack of documentation within the Emergency Services Agency to provide us with any assurance on that across the different CFU units. We did not go out and consult with CFUs or members of the units, but we looked at the documentation maintained within the ESA and made those comments in relation to paragraph 5.108 about “the capability of the Community Fire Units in terms of number of active participants and whether they had participated in relevant training” and “whether equipment and stores were available and being maintained”. There was not that documentation to provide us—or, more specifically, the ESA, we believe—with assurance around that.

Dr Cooper: Essentially, recommendation 17 is about emergency services tightening up, overall, their governance, their reviewing and their maintenance of records. Again, the word “loose” would come up if you looked at what the system is. It was a bit loose. It does not mean that they are not valuable; but the mechanism of managing that system was loose. So you cannot draw conclusions based on some of the information we had.

MS PORTER: So you were looking for information and you could not find it?

Dr Cooper: We would like to see documentation around their governance, their purpose, planning and administration. There is a resource out there. How do they evaluate the effectiveness of it? How can they change it if they do not evaluate it? Review and consolidate some of the procedures. Maintain accurate records of the activities about training, program participants and the issuing of stores, so that you have got some consistency in the way you deal with them, even though there may be a need for individual variability.

Mr Stanton: Paragraphs 5.96 to 5.99 talk about planning for the CFUs. Essentially, we were looking at how those units were located throughout Canberra and the ACT. We found in paragraph 5.96:

There are no strategic plans, business plans or other plans associated with the ...
program ...

Paragraph 5.98 says:

... minimal documentation related to the planning for, and placement of, Community Fire Units or the criteria associated with their placement.

It was asserted to us—I think there was a document referred to in paragraph 5.98, from 2007—that the locations of the units had been selected based on risk and filling of identified operational gaps. But we were not provided with evidence to support that assertion that was made there.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: I want to go to a graph. I am not sure which page it is on, but I think it is figure 6.1. Which graph was that?

THE CHAIR: I think you are on page 146.

MS BERRY: Sorry, my document does not have the correct numbers. Anyway, it was the number of roles and the shortfalls in—

Dr Cooper: Ms Berry, can you give us the paragraph number?

THE CHAIR: I think it is figure 6.1 on page 164.

MS BERRY: It is 6.51.

Dr Cooper: Thanks, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: You did not talk to the community fire units. I do not suppose you went out and spoke to the brigade people? You just went on documentation from these? Yes? That is right? Okay. I wonder whether, through your documentation, you could assess whether or not there was a problem within the Rural Fire Service. From this report it looks as though it is top-heavy. Am I wrong?

Dr Cooper: I do not think we comment on top-heavy or not. Which paragraph are you interpreting that from?

MS BERRY: I am going to 6.52 and then 6.53. It says:

These results can be disaggregated into the current numbers ... This analysis shows that there is a concentration of the more senior fireground roles of Crew Leader and Group Leader in the Parks Brigade.

Then it goes on and talks about—

Dr Cooper: You may expect that to occur. The reason you might expect that to occur is that they are full-time officers. You may not. You may get others senior in the other non-full-time brigade.

MS BERRY: That is right.

Dr Cooper: Yes.

MS BERRY: I wanted to find out whether, in the non-full-time brigade, you think it was a problem in the training and the fitness tests that it has not been passed down. Could you find that from the documentation? No?

Dr Cooper: We did not look at that issue.

MS BERRY: Okay.

Dr Cooper: This is a simple statement of fact about concentration of roles. We did not actually go and say, “Why is this so?”

MS BERRY: Okay.

Mr Brown: I may be able to help a bit on figure 6.1.

MS BERRY: Yes.

Mr Brown: We talked in detail with the Rural Fire Service and about the training and development model that they were applying. They had identified seven or more discrete roles for the Rural Fire Service. A role is not synonymous with an individual; an individual can have many roles, multiple roles. But, in essence, in order to provide a certain type of resource—an appliance or a unit, with a team, a crew, with that unit—there may be a number of roles.

We looked at the model they had for the number of roles and we identified that they were closing the gap but there was still a gap in terms of the number of roles they needed to fully utilise their 51 appliances. They had a resourcing model in terms of the number of roles and personnel that are needed to have the most effect with the appliances and units. Some of those roles are requiring significantly more experience. When we talk about crew leaders, group leaders, these are much more experienced roles, and we found the experienced roles generally were populated by officers from the Parks Brigade. But we did see—the graph perhaps is not the most helpful in the world, but it is trying to show it—that the gap in terms of the number of roles that cannot be filled has been decreasing over the last 18 months.

MS BERRY: Yes.

Mr Brown: So they are beginning to build up those roles—four of the seven roles.

THE CHAIR: Given the importance of the Parks Brigade for that and the MOU—we are just running out of time—could you comment on the MOU and your expectation as to whether TAMS is meeting its responsibility under the MOU. One of the recommendations, I think, talks about reviewing it and tightening it up. What would you be looking for?

Dr Cooper: We would be looking for an MOU or some equivalent that actually gets signed off so that all the entities involved know exactly what they have agreed to in their roles and they go and deliver accordingly. I think it is seven years of discussion every year about whether to sign or not to sign. That suggested to audit that there was disagreement. For something as fundamental as coordinating firefighting activities,

we would hope there would be complete harmony in the working relationship.

THE CHAIR: Part of the MOU focuses on parks providing a certain number of incident management officers, group officers et cetera. Are they meeting their obligations there, and do they have the capability to provide them over a period of time, over a prolonged fire?

Dr Cooper: I think that gets back to the thing we talked about before; the overarching statement of capability is needed. I would imagine the MOU then fits under that. I think the two are interrelated.

Mr Brown: I would point you to paragraph 6.28. We did review these MOUs, and it has been a habit over the last seven or eight years to try to move this forward and get a signed commitment to the MOU. Certainly in the years 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 there were draft MOUs that never quite made it through to finalisation. These MOUs do state a capability within the Parks Brigade upon which the RFS wish to depend. That figure has varied from 72 up to 134, but I think the answer to your question is that it depends on how much you rely upon an MOU that has not been signed off from both sides.

THE CHAIR: You say at the end of para 6.29 that it remains a risk to the ACT. I assume you would like to see the MOU signed before the start of this year's fire season?

Dr Cooper: It would be prudent to have that governance arrangement firmly in place.

THE CHAIR: Yes, it would. Members, are there final questions? We have gone a little bit over time.

MS PORTER: No.

THE CHAIR: Auditor-General and your staff, thank you very much for your appearance today. A transcript will be provided for you to peruse. If there are any corrections or any additional material that you would like to provide, we would be grateful to receive it. I do not believe you have taken any questions on notice, so thank you for the fullness of your answers.

Meeting suspended from 3.02 to 3.31 pm.

HETTINGER MR MICHAEL, Chair, North Canberra Community Council
ALBURY-COLLESS, MS MARIANNE, Committee member, North Canberra Community Council

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon members, ladies and gentlemen. We now return to the inquiry of the public accounts committee into Auditor-General's report No 5 of 2013, bushfire preparedness. Before the committee we now have the North Canberra Community Council. Thank you for your attendance today.

I need to inform you that there are protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read and understood the implications of the statement?

Mr Hettinger: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and they are also being webstreamed and broadcast live. When the *Hansard* is available, it will be provided to you for corrections or additions that you might like to add.

Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Hettinger: Yes, thanks. My name is Mike Hettinger, I am Chair of the North Canberra Community Council. We are the community council that represents the suburbs of the inner north. We are recognised as the peak community representative for that area of Canberra. We are very interested in these particular topics related to the report of the inquiry obviously because of our location and the fact that we are right next to some of the major nature reserves. We are quite pleased and very happy to be able to come here today.

I am also a member of a community fire unit—CFU 28, South Dryandra—and I have had experience in CFU matters as well. As far as the NCCC—North Canberra Community Council—is concerned, we have definitely an interest in seeing the CFU program expanded possibly into other suburbs in the inner north. That is pretty much all I have to say at the moment.

THE CHAIR: We will move to questions. You state on page 3 of your submission that there are currently four CFUs in the area and you suggest that there might be a need for more. Where are those additional CFUs and what is the justification for having them?

Ms Albury-Colless: My justification was to, first of all, identify that there was an ember drop zone, which is captured on the north Canberra fire management zone map at the back of the submission. I realised that, in fact, we were circled by this particular, rather alarming, attribute. I looked at where the CFUs were already positioned and then realised there were some gaps. I know CFUs are voluntary and it is all very well for me to list the ones that could possibly be used to fill those gaps, but this would be

a resource as well as an intention by the communities involved, the residents associations et cetera, adjoining those particular areas. The ones I identified are Ainslie, Hackett, Reid, Watson, Downer and Lyneham. I think professional advice would be good to see whether the gaps relate to the suburbs or whether there is a better way of looking at it. I simply realised these suburbs were not covered by a CFU and that possibly there could be enough impetus and interest in those particular suburbs to make sure their suburbs had a CFU.

THE CHAIR: You go on to say in paragraph 5 resourcing of the four CFUs currently located should be continued. Is there a concern that they will not be resourced?

Ms Albury-Colless: Not that I was aware of, except the fact that I realise this is an Auditor-General's report, and so I presumed resourcing is always going to be at the pointy end of these concerns. I just wanted to get my point across that I presumed that those CFUs are probably doing as good a job as they possibly can given resources and that, hopefully, they were not going to be penalised in any way at the end of this reporting process.

Mr Hettinger: There are a number of advantages with community fire units. First of all, it adds a bit of formality to it and it makes the community aware of fire issues and what to do about them. I know in our particular situation—as I said, I am with the South Dryandra CFU—it really helps us to understand what we have in the area and what our capabilities are and it allows us to exercise a number of things, including, if you want to call it, operational readiness. We are pretty basic. We know we do not go into the bush; we have had a number of training sessions that tell us that.

The main thing I would like to see is that training continues and anyone who might be interested is afforded the opportunity. In general, community knowledge is a very strong thing to have. Before these things were around, people were ignorant about it all. They knew of the threat but they did not have that much information about it. So having the community fire units has been a real plus.

MS PORTER: With regard to community awareness, do you get any feedback or are you actively engaged as a council in encouraging people to download their own bushfire plans and to fill them out and have them done in readiness?

Mr Hettinger: No, we have not done that. It would actually be very good if we could have someone from emergency services or the appropriate area to come to our meetings and give us more information on that. We have found that, because planning issues tend to predominate, that tends to suck out all of our time and energy. We really want to get involved in a number of different things outside basic planning issues. Having someone come in and give us information on how to become prepared for bushfires or any other issues would be really advantageous. We are all volunteers ourselves, and, in some cases, we really rely on the professional side to be able to not only provide us with advice but actually engage and that they use us as a conduit so they can get to more residents.

MS PORTER: You would have read in the report by the Auditor-General about communications with the community. As a test of communication, do you recall last year before the fire season or during the fire season receiving in your letterbox the

updated information about the different levels of fire categories with how to download a plan, how to fill it in and all those kinds of things? It was about an A5 coloured pamphlet of several pages?

Ms Albury-Colless: I do not recall receiving something in my letterbox. Would you know if they had been sent to the community councils? There are about a dozen community councils?

MS PORTER: No, they would have been sent to individual letterboxes. I just wondered, because there were some problems perceived with some of that communication with where the deliverers may have delivered them.

Mr Hettinger: I do not remember receiving anything in my mailbox. Luckily, when you are in a CFU, you get text messages and there are a number of other ways of getting informed, including emails from the team leader. We also get training as well, so if you are on a CFU, you are informed more in that way. But it is an interesting point; I do not recall seeing anything in my letterbox. I think I would have noticed it.

MS PORTER: Did you observe much on the television or on the radio about updating your bushfire plan?

Mr Hettinger: Occasionally, yes.

THE CHAIR: On page 2 you state that the NCCC agrees with the observations and would, therefore, recommend that greater attention be given to north Canberra with regard to effective engagement with stakeholders, provision of relevant information and applying appropriate measures in relation to the area's ember zones. Does that suggest you have been ignored or neglected, or is there just a bit of a vacuum in regard to the dissemination of information?

Ms Albury-Colless: I think I mentioned before that I was rather amazed to see this map that I referred to earlier, which was provided by the ESA. That was the first time I realised that the area we represent is within an ember drop zone. I understand the difference between an ember drop zone and an ember attack zone, and I think it is unlikely that we are going to get the latter. As an individual my house is well away from the ember drop zone, but I know there are quite a number of families with homes that lie along that perimeter. This made me wonder whether they knew they were in an ember drop zone, whether their gardens were appropriate and less flammable than the usual gardens and whether their buildings et cetera, or any planned renovations, might comply with what one might say is a better level of bushfire compliance in terms of building regulations. I put that in there to try and cap all those particular elements that I thought were rather important. Yes, it did come to me as a surprise that where we are situated is surrounded by an ember drop zone which has been, presumably, scientifically produced.

THE CHAIR: There was a fire, if I recall, in the early 80s or the mid-80s that jumped off Black Mountain into the top end of O'Connor around Black Mountain School and did some damage.

Ms Albury-Colless: During the 2003 Canberra fires, I was able to pick up hot

gumleaves from my veranda which had come from Black Mountain. I am much closer to Mount Ainslie than I am to Black Mountain. We most likely would get the big fronts coming from the west, but with an ember drop zone, we could be likely to get things coming in from the east that we need to be prepared for. I am not trying to be an alarmist; preparedness is the best recipe.

THE CHAIR: If the government or their agents were willing to come to the north side community council, that would be acceptable for you to have a focus in the lead-up to the season?

Mr Hettinger: Yes.

MS BERRY: Regarding the Northern Canberra Community Council, how many members do you have?

Mr Hettinger: Unfortunately, I do not have the numbers with me. Our secretary would have that.

MS BERRY: I was wondering how you get information out to people. I am sure the government would come, on invitation, to talk with you about bushfire preparedness, particularly for this season coming up and then using all of the community councils and all of the other groups to provide information. I think it needs to be provided every single year, but then maybe the community fire units can do that sort of work as well on a volunteer basis around your street or your neighbours and things like that. Is that something you guys have talked about?

Mr Hettinger: On the CFU side, last year a number of fire trucks and facilities were put up at Black Mountain School, so that actually drew a lot of people from the area and raised awareness of the fact that there was a CFU in the area and that they could join it. That was definitely really good. Interestingly, on the community council side, that is a resource that probably could be used more. For example, if there is some kind of event happening, such as the one I just mentioned, it would be good to publicise it through the community council. We email our members on meetings and agendas and any issues that come up, so that is one way we get the word out. The other way is we get a monthly article in the *Chronicle* before the meeting to let people know what is going on, when the next meeting is and what we will be discussed at the next meeting. Occasionally the *Canberra Times* might contact us on any particular issues that might be happening.

Typically what happens is we might get an approach by a government agency, usually more on the planning side, as I said before. You might have a proponent for a development and they want to present it at the council. We actually have an agenda where we tend to have more people waiting than blank spots. Given that, it would probably be good to have someone from the government side approach us and say when they would like to do it so that we could program it into our agenda a few months in advance. I am guessing October, November would be a good time for someone to do a briefing and provide information on CFUs and bushfire preparedness in general.

THE CHAIR: I am sure a minister's office is listening and you will be inundated

with phone calls.

Mr Hettinger: Yes, that is right.

THE CHAIR: When does the council meet?

Mr Hettinger: We meet on the third Wednesday of the month, at 7.30, presently at ACTSport House at Hackett.

MS BERRY: Just on your No 3 recommendation in your submission, you have recommended that there be a regular monitoring of 'community knowledge and understanding with the aim to actively affect appropriate fire-safety knowledge and behaviour particularly for those living and working within the ember zone'. How would you suggest that that could be monitored when it seems that there is a bit of a disconnect sometimes in the information getting to people? Are people reading the pamphlets? Are people seeing the messages on television? I think pretty much everyone saw the messages on television following the Victorian fires. But how do we monitor what is the best medium, or do we just need to blanket and spam the suburb basically, or those areas that are at risk?

Ms Albury-Colless: That is a very good question. I would tend to think it would be—again, resources depending—good to establish a baseline knowledge in the first instance. In fact, you would probably need to develop a really sound engagement strategy as well as, aligned with that, a communications strategy. By establishing a baseline, you would get a bit of an idea through survey exactly what people know and what they need to know from that baseline and work from there. I think the other thing that survey could possibly cover is how best to engage with people. I think you will find that there are multiple ways and there is probably no one easy fix. It is a cluster of ways of connecting with people to get the message across. But I would say a baseline survey and move from there and engage in a genuine way with the community.

I suppose I have taken a very parochial local view here, but I think some of these things could be obviously done in any other ember zones and other communities around Canberra that could be affected. I was trying to manage the piece that I knew most about.

MS BERRY: The reason why I am talking about the work of the CFU in not just fire prevention or preparedness and what other work that you do within the community is that I know Aranda CFU used to do all that, leaflet all the houses that backed onto the reserve there each year. They would just go out and do it for the ones that were most at risk and make sure they knew about the CFU themselves. I know it is volunteering, I know it is tough.

Mr Hettinger: I know that our CFU did something similar this past year around O'Connor. So it does happen. I do not know how many CFUs do it.

MS PORTER: Elsey Street does.

Mr Hettinger: Okay. It is a common thing. I look at the community councils as being,

as I said, some way of actually providing information in general, including possibly advice to people on how to join a CFU, if they wish to. It is one of these things where people can be unconsciously ignorant—they do not know what they do not know.

THE CHAIR: You then go on after your recommendations to talk about information on fire resistant landscape and garden design. How do you think the government should go about that? Is that straight to the residents or do you use the council as a conduit?

Ms Albury-Colless: I think that could be done with both parties—government leading the way and community councils and associations picking up on that in terms of garden design. I think we are all conscious of the fact that we are moving into drier and hotter climate conditions, and I think most people who are keen on gardens—they seem to be most Canberrans in this particular instance—would like advice as much as possible in terms of replanting or extending plantings. If they know that certain plants have certain attributes that are more fire retardant than others, then I think that would be really helpful information.

Obviously, the nurseries might be interested in assisting with that too, to prioritise the sale of certain plants as having those particular types of attributes. I think a lot of the rural communities are very well aware of trees and plants that have that sort of attribute.

Mr Hettinger: I also recall that Yarralumla Nursery used to have a whole bunch of things up along the side that gave you advice. This would be something similar to that. Floriade also has—normally it is in the context of native plants—something that gives you advice on what to plant and what would be considered fire resistant, that sort of thing. People out there would appreciate the advice. They are not necessarily sure where to look.

Ms Albury-Colless: May I add a very brief comment which I meant to do at first and make my apology, because I got the wrong date, obviously, for the royal commission into the Victorian bushfires. I am sure you have noticed it and are being very polite, but it should be 2009, not 2003. Obviously the Canberra events loomed still large and traumatically in my head. But 2009 should be the right date, as you would know, for the Victorian bushfires.

THE CHAIR: That is fine. After the landscaping, you then go on about ACTPLA's role. Do you think they are doing enough to promote making sure that renovations, in particular in your part of the world, are done in a way that help resist fires, or is there a need there to get more information out?

Mr Hettinger: I suppose if I had to say it very quickly, I would say I have no idea what they are doing. I suppose this dovetails into some other issues we have had with ACTPLA, and that is related to the changes in development rules. I am thinking mainly knockdowns and rebuilds. A lot of them do not even require development applications anymore and the certification processes have been effectively outsourced. So there is no way for residents to really know what new building might be built in their neighbourhood, no idea on whether or not the building would meet any standards related to bushfire resistance. This has been a general complaint we have had, that we

feel that the system is no longer transparent and accountable, and this is just one other aspect of it.

THE CHAIR: But it would be desirable, particularly on the fringe of the area that you represent, that when renovations or knockdowns and rebuilds occur, it is all done consistent with the building code such that fire resistant buildings are put in place?

Mr Hettinger: Yes, indeed.

MS BERRY: Is there something you have thought of in the meantime? I feel like we have covered all your recommendations. Is there anything you wanted to say?

Ms Albury-Colless: Yes. There are a couple of things. I was very interested to listen to the Auditor-General and her staff before. I realise that she is emphasising that this is all a shared responsibility, and I could not agree more. From my observation, silos just do not work in the areas of fire, water and air. I suppose to that end, I was wondering how you can effect integration and coordination of the services. I do not think I have either read or heard how the NCA plays a role.

I am raising that because I think that there is some land—maybe I am misunderstanding the terminology that is being used here—that is commonwealth owned. I would tend to think the War Memorial which abuts, of course, Mount Ainslie is. Then, moving further southeast, you have got the various defence installations. I was wondering how best that integration and cooperation could be managed with those commonwealth-owned and managed properties and what provisions could be put in place to ensure that if a fire breaks out, for example, on Mount Ainslie or Mount Majura, there are procedures that are properly coordinated put in place.

I just felt the NCA, or whoever the commonwealth body was, did not seem to be part of those discussions. The National Capital Authority just seemed to me to be the one point of reference. You probably know that there are others. I just wondered about that.

The only other thing that I would like to raise is: with regard to CFUs, after an event—and the earlier speakers were talking about monitoring and evaluation, and I would tend to think monitoring and evaluation not only in terms of communication and engagement but also post a fire event—what procedures can be used to capitalise on the learnings from maybe what went right or, in some cases, what went wrong. I was just wondering whether that could be incorporated into any M&E strategy. That is all I wanted to say.

MS BERRY: A debrief afterwards?

Ms Albury-Colless: Yes, the debriefing is really important, and to capture those learnings, as they say.

THE CHAIR: I am sure one of the members will bring that up with the relevant minister. The report looks particularly at Defence and Attorney-General's Department, which have the largest landholdings, and RMC and the field firing range. I have been

to a number of fires at the field firing range lit by cadets in their training endeavours. I think it is quite clear, if you read through the report, there are a number of mentions—and the auditor said this earlier today—of the relationship between ESA and TAMS, but there are these other organisations that need to be tied in. Of course, we often call on the military for assistance—lots of cadets out there and helicopters and things. Yes, that whole issue of federal involvement is also very important.

MS BERRY: I have one more question of the North Canberra Community Council. Would you be able to assess from your membership whether there was any stomach for people who are part of that council to be willing to be part of a CFU, if ones were to be set up in the areas that you have suggested? It is all well and good to put the equipment there but maybe it is something that your council have people who have a desire to be part of that?

Mr Hettinger: You do not want to put equipment there with no-one to actually use it. The first step—we have not done anything of course, and we could be the conduit to do that—is that that could be associated with the briefing. So there could be a briefing at a meeting, materials could be handed out and, from that, we could basically approach or email the membership and find out who might be interested or if there is anyone who might even be interested in starting one and go to other neighbours as well.

What happened in my particular situation was just a neighbour went around and contacted all of us and asked if we would be interested in forming a CFU. So I would imagine the same kind of thing could happen in other suburbs as well. But we could be the catalyst to start it off, yes.

THE CHAIR: If you check page 20, the government has an emergency coordination centre operations manual and a coordination centre. If it is activated, groups like the National Capital Authority, the Australian government's departments of Defence and Attorney-General's are all involved. So there is some coordination there. But you have also got to manage the asset and the land before the fires start.

Ms Albury-Colless: Yes, exactly.

THE CHAIR: We will take that on board. Final questions? No. With your permission, the committee will authorise publication of an amended version of your submission and change the date from 2003 to 2009, just for history's sake. We will take care of that.

Thank you for your attendance today. We will get you a copy of the transcript when it is available. If there is anything you would like to correct, if you could provide that to the committee, we will take a look at that. With that, we will finish the hearing now. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 4.01 pm.