



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

THURSDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 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.

WITNESSES

CORBELL, MR SIMON, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and
Minister for the Environment.....**26**

LANE, MR DOMINIC, Commissioner, ACT Emergency Services Agency,
Justice and Community Safety Directorate.....**26**

STARK, MR ANDREW, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT
Emergency Services Agency, Justice and Community Safety Directorate**26**

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.32 am.

CORBELL, MR SIMON, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Environment

LANE, MR DOMINIC, Commissioner, ACT Emergency Services Agency, Justice and Community Safety Directorate

STARK, MR ANDREW, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT Emergency Services Agency, Justice and Community Safety Directorate

THE CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts into the Auditor-General's report No 5 of 2013 on bushfire preparedness. On behalf of the committee, I welcome you, minister, in the various capacities in which you appear today, together with your directorate and agency officials attending today. This hearing is scheduled to conclude at approximately 11 am.

In accordance with the public accounts committee's resolution of appointment, all reports of the Auditor-General stand referred to the public accounts committee after presentation. The committee has established a procedure for its examination of the referred Auditor-General's reports. The committee considered the Auditor-General's report No 5 2013 in accordance with these procedures and resolved to further inquire 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 is specifically focused on three areas: elements underpinning strategic readiness for bushfire prevention and preparedness, the farm firewise program and the implementation of audit recommendations.

Can I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink coloured privilege statement before you on the table. I would ask: have you read the statement and do you understand the implications therein?

Mr Corbell: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that, minister. Could I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed with questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Corbell: Yes, thank you, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would like to make an opening statement. At the time of the release of the Auditor-General's report on bushfire preparedness in the ACT, the government welcomed its release as it praised the framework that is in place for bushfire preparedness for our community. The Auditor-General found that the legislative framework currently in place and the policies and processes that underpin it, such as the SBMP, regional fire management plans and bushfire operational plans, all provide a solid bedrock for the effective management of bushfire risk in the

territory.

The audit has provided us with an assurance that the ESA, its staff and volunteers are working well to ensure they are ready to respond to, and that the community is prepared for, bushfires when they inevitably occur. The Auditor-General's report provided the government with recommendations on where improvements could be made, which the government welcomed at the time.

As the committee would know, I formally tabled the government's response to the audit on 27 February this year after it was initially submitted to the PAC for consideration in October last year. The government's response was a well-considered and measured one.

The government has agreed or agreed in part to the 24 audit report recommendations. Six of those were considered high priority by the Auditor-General. When the audit report came out, the ESA, in consultation and cooperation across government, immediately went about making steps to address the recommendations where improvements were required.

As I previously told members of the Assembly in my tabling statement in February this year, seven of the recommendations have already been addressed. These are recommendations 2, 4, 10, 18, 22, 23 and 24. The ESA and other government directorates are continuing to action the 17 remaining recommendations. Without going into details, the ESA can provide updates to the committee today on those remaining recommendations and their current progress.

The government is and always will be committed to ensuring that the territory is well prepared for the inevitable prospect of bushfire and that bushfire plans and resources are in place. The Auditor-General has previously stated that the government's prevention and preparedness activities position the community to meet the challenges of living in the bush capital. And she has further commented that the government has made significant funding investments to the ESA, noting there has been a 133 per cent increase in funding from 2004-05 to 2013. These funding actions have included the implementation of the community fire units program, upgrades to and construction of new ESA ambulance, Fire & Rescue, RFS and SES facilities as well as upgrades to and the delivery of new firefighting appliances and equipment.

The Auditor-General also positively commented in her report on the government's implementation of the majority of recommendations from the McLeod and Doogan inquiries and the implementation of legislative reform following the 2003 bushfires, such as the passing of the Emergencies Act.

I would like to briefly turn to the development of strategic bushfire management plan version 3. As the committee would be aware, the government undertook a review of SBMP version 2 last year. I can advise the committee today that that review has been completed after an extensive consultation process through local media, online and social media, as well as through a series of public meetings.

Targeted consultation with key stakeholders has also occurred, such as with the ACT Conservation Council, the ACT Bushfire Council, ActewAGL, ACTEW Water, the

Conservator of Flora and Fauna, the rural leaseholders association, the Environment Protection Authority and the Environment and Sustainability Commissioner. The government's key message from this review process has been living on the edge—help shape bushfire management in the ACT. This was designed to attract the attention of Canberrans living in at-risk areas where the city meets the bush.

Understanding all of the factors that contribute to bushfire risk and carefully considering what may be done to modify and change them forms the basis of the new SBMP version 3. The revised SBMP describes complementary strategies to reduce risks around 12 objectives. These address the risks of bushfires starting, spreading and impacting on people, property and the environment.

The 12 objectives are: reduction in bushfire ignitions, effective firefighting operations by skilled and motivated personnel, necessary equipment and resources to respond to and extinguish bushfires, extinguishing bushfires when they occur, planned fire management on rural lands, broad area bushfire fuel reduction across the natural and rural landscape, access for vehicles and firefighters to undertake bushfire-fighting and fuel reduction, adaptive management to provide continuous improvement in bushfire management, community preparedness for fire, effective land use policy and planning that reduces bushfire risk, integrated measures for bushfire protection at the urban edge, and community and government recovery from the effects of bushfire.

Draft SBMP version 3 is due to be published in October. I expect to table the final draft in the Assembly in late September.

Very quickly and finally, I would like to talk about strategic readiness for bushfire prevention and preparedness. The SBMP explicitly states that the ACT's firefighting capability relies on the maintenance of both volunteer and career firefighting personnel from ACT RFS, ACT Fire & Rescue and the TAMS Directorate's Parks and Conservation Service. I note the feedback from the Auditor-General provided to the ESA regarding the development of such a capability that will provide adequate fire coverage across the territory.

The ESA is scoping requirements for the development of a strategic bushfire capability framework to assist planning for firefighting operations and to support programs for capacity enhancement. The new framework will focus on three key elements. The first is the early detection and suppression of bushfire. This entails the necessary predetermined and risk-based pre-deployment of firefighting capability based on fire conditions at the time. This includes personnel and equipment such as remote area firefighting teams, or RAF teams, as well as incident management and emergency response capability as detailed in the elevated fire danger plan.

The second is to minimise the impact of bushfires on people and assets through the development of a dynamic coverage instrument. This proposed instrument is a decision-making tool that would analyse response-based fire behaviour and includes the utilisation of fire behaviour analysts to allow for early deployment of firefighting resources to bushfires. This proposed instrument provides operational planners with a visual display that combines the service's risk profile and fire danger rating with live data on appliance availability to inform backup moves between stations in order to maintain good risk response cover.

Finally, it is to do everything operationally possible to protect people and assets from significant and imminent fire danger. This would mean not only placing available ACT resources to protect people but also to utilise interstate assistance in doing so. Such assistance can be achieved through greater strengthening of interstate and commonwealth arrangements.

I am conscious of the time. So I will conclude my statement at that point. But thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. I and my officials are happy to try to answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that, minister. You rattled off a number of recommendations—2, 4, 10 and finished with 20, 22, 23, 24. Were there some more in the middle that I did not catch?

Mr Corbell: Yes. The ones that I indicated have been addressed in full at this time are recommendations 2, 4, 10, 18, 22, 23 and 24.

THE CHAIR: The Auditor-General did in her report praise the framework that was set up. But she also identified a number of gaps and issues that should be addressed. In fact, recommendation 2 is the explicit list of assets required to conduct operations in the ACT. I do not know if you have had a chance to read the *Hansard* of Dr Cooper's appearance back on 26 August, but we had a discussion about: do we have a situation and what assets do you need to address that situation, or do you take the list of assets that you have got and that drives what you do? Dr Cooper said:

We looked at what was put in there and what was put in there was the 51 appliances determining the resources rather than the likely scenarios to drive the resourcing base that we need.

Have we done any work on the likely scenarios that we might face and the resources that would be required?

Mr Corbell: I will ask the commissioner, Mr Lane, to provide you with some context in relation to that question.

Mr Lane: ESA certainly has picked up on the feedback of the Auditor-General in relation to how the needs of the ACT are met based on the various likely scenarios we could face. That is why, as the minister has explained, we have developed a strategic bushfire capability framework which will progress out of the new draft strategic bushfire management plan version 3, which will focus on that scalability that the Auditor-General provided feedback on; that is, a system that is based on those three premises the minister went through of our base resourcing capability and how we effectively meet the day-to-day needs of protecting the territory from fire. It then works into what you do when fire danger increases. We are considering the development of an instrument that assists operational planners in the development of a scalability system so that when fire danger ratings start to increase and when fires start to occur, you have a system that dynamically allows you to assess the risks and address those risks to ensure our response capability is high, whether that is through the setting up of additional resources, putting on aircraft, the utilisation of

machinery—all of the things that we may need to do in the event of that.

It needs to be recognised, as the Auditor-General certainly did as well, that there will be those days when, under catastrophic fire danger conditions, all of the resources of the ACT might not necessarily be available to protect the community to the extent that we want. As we go into those sorts of conditions, by actually having the proper planning in place for the first two, we can then draw on our interstate and commonwealth resources, particularly in relation to the work the commonwealth is currently doing about the establishment of a national capability for bushfire suppression. Understanding the full availability of resources on a national scale, of which ACT is a significant contributor, allows for those pre-planning decisions to be made so that, should we be looking towards those worst-of-the-worst scenarios, we resource effectively or to the best of our ability, utilising not only the resources of the ACT but those of our commonwealth and interstate neighbours.

In other words, Mr Chair, to pick up on what I certainly took as the feedback from the Auditor-General of meeting the likely need under different scenarios, that is the approach ESA is considering following the completion of the SBMP version 3.

THE CHAIR: In your time as commissioner and previously, what work has been done by RFS to determine what is the base requirement for equipment, training and staffing, and how many documents or iterations of documents are there that the committee might be able to see?

Mr Lane: I am not particularly aware of what occurred before my time, obviously, regarding that work. It is something that we always do in relation to considering our risk across the territory. We have established, I suppose, our baseline risk through the territory-wide risk assessment, which is based on national guidelines to determine that.

In terms of resourcing, as I said before, when you have those worst-of-the-worst days, those catastrophic bushfire danger conditions, you never have enough. I think the classic example occurred only last year, in the Blue Mountains in October 2013, when you had one of the best resourced fire services in the world, with a highly trained combination of volunteers and paid firefighters, with high saturation of fire stations across the Blue Mountains, and still 200 homes were lost in a very short space of time. That is the nature of working with natural disasters, which bushfire is. The capability requirement may never be enough, depending on the situation.

THE CHAIR: You talk about a baseline. The baseline gives us coverage in what circumstances?

Mr Lane: Your question around baseline is in relation to our current resourcing?

THE CHAIR: You spoke earlier about base resourcing for the day to day. It is called an emergency services because it is not the day to day. Is the day to day adequate and do we have adequate resourcing? What work have you done to justify the resourcing we have as adequate?

Mr Lane: It gets back to the point that, as we know here in Canberra, for the vast majority of fire weather conditions we face, we do have adequate resourcing. For

every year in Canberra, I think when I looked back over the last dozen years in relation to days of total fire ban—that is, days when the fire danger rating goes to severe, which is a level where fires become much more difficult to contain and which is why rapid detection and an immediate response is so important—we have the vast majority of resources available.

Outside those other 358 or 359 days of the year, we always have more than adequate. It is about how we address it when we have, on average, five days that may go into severe or extreme fire danger—and sometimes on those days only for a matter of hours on those days, from the time period of usually about 2 o'clock until 6 o'clock at night. If you wish to try and adequately have the resourcing available for all of that, who knows how much extra you would need when you look at the Blue Mountains scenario of last year?

As I said, for the remaining 359 or 360 days of the year, our resourcing is certainly adequate to meet the bushfire risk. Of course, given the resources that we have, we make decisions based on priorities, based upon the need to stand up additional resources should they be required in terms of contracted arrangements, interstate arrangements or commonwealth arrangements, which supplement our high level of capability we already have.

MS PORTER: Thank you, minister, for your opening statement. I want to go to some of the recommendations and some of the discussion that we have been having this morning, and the comments that you made about preparedness—in particular, the community preparedness. There are some comments in the documentation about communication between various parts of government. I would be interested to hear your comments about how you believe the different parts of government are prepared to work together should there be an incident like what we have experienced before. That is about government's preparedness to work together across directorates.

I also want to get some comments about how you think we have been able to improve, in response to some of this commentary, communication plans in relation to the community and the media in particular, and also the general community. Do you believe, minister, that this has been improving since the time of the 2003 fires, when we know that communication was one of the issues that we faced?

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Ms Porter. Are you referring to any particular recommendation or just more generally?

MS PORTER: More in general, because the commentary is made throughout, about being prepared, the government being joined up across different directorates and having that whole-of-government response. It also talks about recommendations around the preparedness of the community.

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Ms Porter. Your question perhaps can be best answered in two parts. The first deals with the broader emergency management framework that is in place within ACT government, across the government. The second is in relation to public information and advice, warnings and so on, in anticipation of or during a bushfire emergency.

Turning to the first part, which is around coordination within and across government, since 2003 a significant commitment has been made in terms of the formal legislative framework, the development of the emergency plan, the bushfire planning framework, the SBMP itself, to determine the coordination mechanisms and fora that have to work within government to ensure that there is coordination across government in an emergency. That is ultimately in the context of a severe or catastrophic fire event, led through, ultimately strategically, the security and emergency management committee of cabinet, which is specifically designated with the capacity to undertake strategic decisions about bushfire response and recovery to what is a significant fire emergency.

But underpinning that would be, in a normal event, for a severe or catastrophic incident, the appointment, say, of a territory controller under the Emergencies Act. That position has significant powers. In the event of a fire emergency, that would be the ESA commissioner. It would be the commissioner's job to ensure that the resources across the ACT government were being deployed both to a fire response and also to recovery operations that would flow from that. So the emergency controller position has been established in legislation. Importantly, through amendments that have been made to the Emergencies Act in recent years, there is the capacity for pre-emptive appointment of the emergency controller in anticipation of a potential or actual threat emerging as a result of fire.

Previously, we had a framework where we had to wait until things got very bad before a territory controller was appointed. We now have in legislation the statutory power—the Chief Minister has the statutory power—to pre-emptively take steps to prepare the community for that imminent prospect of impact and damage. Those are very important mechanisms at the highest level when we are talking about a 2003-like scenario emerging again.

It is also important to emphasise what the frameworks are for the lower level of emergency, which is actually the more common emergency. We have to plan for the 2003 scenario, but it is less likely than a lower order emergency of, say, a fast-running grassfire that threatens to have an impact on the urban edge, for example, or fire in one of our nature parks and reserves, but not a conflagration like we saw in 2003.

Again, through the frameworks established within government, such as the security and emergency management senior officers group—SEMSOG, as it is known—which would be convened to provide advice directly to ministers on the emerging situation and scenario, and steps that should be taken to address that, through to the operational leadership of the chief officer of the relevant service, whether it is Fire & Rescue or ACT Rural Fire, and also through the coordination role of the commissioner through the emergency coordination centre, which is a statutory requirement in the emergencies plan, we have, I think, a very robust set of governance arrangements to guide coordination across government.

For example, in the ECC, we have the capacity to house all the different respective elements of the ACT government which need to be there to coordinate a response. Whether it is health, education, territory and municipal services, the utility operators such as our gas, electricity and water utility operators, whether it is the NCA or whether it is, potentially, the commonwealth defence department in terms of mutual aid arrangements, these are capacities now and physical spaces that people know they

have an obligation to staff in the event that the ECC is stood up. Those arrangements and communication alerts are regularly tested within government so that each directorate understand they do have obligations to be represented in the emergency coordination centre and that they have a task to feed back coordination issues to their relevant part of government.

Finally, in relation to public information, public information is critical, and I am confidently of the view that we have taken very significant steps in the past decade. Obviously there has been the high-profile development of new communications infrastructure, such as emergency alert, which the ESA tests on a regular basis. But also, there is the more practical day-to-day information that is pushed out to the community through the single point of truth framework. This is about recognising that in an emergency there is one point that everyone in the community can go to to find out what is going on. The ESA has developed web-based and social media based mechanisms, as well as more conventional, traditional, electronic and print media-based liaison mechanisms, to ensure that information is pushed out on a regular basis.

The capabilities that we now have in the ESA headquarters are significant in this respect. We have a dedicated media briefing room; we have the capacity for live feed into television networks from that media briefing room. We also have the capacity for live feed into radio broadcasts. And we have, purpose-built, effectively a small radio studio at the ESA headquarters that allows us to effectively patch through key personnel within the ESA, whether it is the commissioner or others, directly to radio stations so that they can broadcast that information in real time.

So I think we have a very strong framework for public information. Emerging out of SBMP 3 will be the next key critical task, which is further grassroots engagement with people who live in particularly vulnerable areas around the city. So the designation of bushfire-prone areas in the urban area of the city itself—not in the rural area but within the urban area of the city itself—is a significant policy change which will be reflected in SBMP 3. That will involve the ESA utilising its volunteer networks and its other networks in terms of personnel on the ground to get out, doorknock and talk to people face to face, in some of the most vulnerable areas in our city, about their bushfire risks and the steps they need to take to be bushfire ready. That is the broad range of capabilities and priorities the ESA has when comes to public information.

MS PORTER: Thank you very much. I just had a couple of questions coming out of that. One is about how the ECC worked, in your opinion, when it was stood up a couple of times last year, as I recall. Do you think that was an effective trial for maybe more severe occurrences?

Mr Corbell: Yes, I believe it was. What we have been doing, on a number of occasions now, is pre-emptively standing up the ECC, not because there is an actual emergency, but because we know there is a heightened risk of one—as a result, for example, of a significant rain event which might be forecast or a significant storm event that might be forecast, but also on days of heightened fire danger. The pre-emptive standing up of the ECC gets people familiar with those arrangements in real time and what it actually means on the ground to be staffing the ECC and undertaking that work. It further tests and strengthens the communication framework that calls

people to the ECC to staff it. It also allows us to be prepared should a more significant emergency response be required. I think that has worked very well.

I should add that, in addition to the ECC, there is the pre-emptive standing up of the public information coordination centre, the PICC, as it is known. The PICC also has a dedicated capability space within the ESA headquarters. This is really the nerve centre of public information communication which has capability for relevant media liaison personnel from within government across different directorates, and staff from the executive as well, to support the messaging from ministers in a time of more significant emergency. Having that coordinated through the PICC, through the work of the public information coordinator, is, I believe, a very important capability that we have in place as well.

MS PORTER: Minister, in relation to the communication to the public, you were talking about social media and web-based methods et cetera, but you were talking about the more conventional ways of getting information out, for instance, the different types of warnings that you might get. We now have a different lot of categories, which go right through to the catastrophic. I am aware that some pamphlet-type information went out to households—last year, I think it was. I am pretty sure it was last year. I asked a question of the Northside Community Council, I think. They consider themselves to be in a bushfire-prone area, and they came to discuss that with us, with the committee. I asked them whether they knew of this pamphlet and whether they had actually received it in their letterbox. They did not.

I know you would be aware, minister, that I am a member of a couple of CFUs. I am split between two; I do not know how I managed that. But in relation to my substantive CFU, on the training day immediately following us receiving that pamphlet, I took it up to the training day to discuss it with the members, to suggest that we might doorknock to make sure everybody received it and was reading it and doing something about it. I was the only member of my CFU that had received it in their letterbox—or were aware that they had received it. It turned out that they had been delivered with a number of other documents through a junk mail deliverer and most people had put it in their paper rubbish, where the man who has the trailer in his yard found it.

I wondered if we have changed our way of delivering that. I believe that at the time feedback was given to ESA about the fact that some people did not actually receive it—well, they received it, but they did not know they received it. I was wondering if we have changed the way of delivering that. I think there are people who still rely on that kind of communication, although, I know, fortunately, more and more people are relying on the more web-based electronic and social media, and, of course, the radio and television. But there are some people who still rely on that more traditional type of communication.

Mr Corbell: Sure. Thanks, Ms Porter. The ESA runs an awareness campaign at the beginning of every bushfire season. It is a radio-based campaign, it is a TV-based campaign and it is a social media based campaign. It is designed to raise general awareness about the fact that we are heading into bushfire season and people need to take steps to prepare their bushfire plan and be ready for bushfire. It refers people to points of contact for further information about having a bushfire plan and so on.

I do not think we can underestimate the difficulty of the task in terms of the number of residents that need to be reached who live in bushfire-prone areas in the ACT. I am advised that it is approximately 40,000 households. That is significant. That is a significant number of households right across the city.

Obviously, the steps that we will need to take out of the development of SBMP 3 are very focused on further micro-targeting of particularly vulnerable communities. We know that there are particular areas within particular suburbs that are particularly prone, that have the highest risk in terms of impact from bushfire because of their proximity to the adjacent vegetation. The focus from SBMP will be to get out at a grassroots level and basically doorknock—with volunteers within say, the community fire units and the Rural Fire Service brigades, and with other personnel across the ESA and potentially other parts of government as well—to explain the particular vulnerabilities in those neighbourhoods, to make sure people are aware of them and they have put together a plan as to how they are going to deal with it. That self-reliance is very important. As we know, you cannot have a fire truck at everyone's front letterbox when a fire starts.

That is very much the emphasis. But in relation to the particular vulnerabilities that have been identified emerging out of SBMP 3, obviously the ESA seeks to maintain a broad range of channels to reach the community. That includes everything from your traditional letterbox drop, and we have talked about door-knocking, through to the channels that more and more people are using: web-based and app-based information on their mobile devices, radio, television, and the more formal alert systems that are in place for an actual emergency where information needs to be sent out to a broad range of people, such as the use of emergency alert itself.

The Auditor-General made recommendations. Recommendation 24 talked about further strengthening of testing procedures in relation to the use of emergency alert. Those are recommendations that the ESA is responding to, and it is putting in place the appropriate measures. For example, in relation to the testing of ESA public alert systems, there was a testing of the ESA public alert update and warning information distribution system, which includes the single point of truth app. They were tested in July this year and also in August this year. We have also undertaken testing of emergency alert itself, the telephone-based warning system. That occurred on 3 May this year. It targeted specific streets in specific suburbs on both the north and the south side of Canberra as well as a rural area.

So we have, I think, a strong regime now in place for testing and a strong range of channels that we rely on to get the message out as broadly as possible, both about preparedness and also about emergency warning itself.

MS PORTER: Thank you. I have got lots of other questions, mainly around recommendations 16 and 17, but I will have a supplementary that I will come back to later.

MS LAWDER: On the consultation for the strategic bushfire management plan, I am not sure about your distribution plan. I think I heard from Tharwa residents that they received the flyer too late for the first Tuggeranong consultation. Do you know if that

is correct? I think there was also one planned specifically for Tharwa and then a later one was held at the Kambah Burns club, but if they could not go to the one in Tharwa, they would have liked the option of the earlier Tuggeranong one. In terms of your planning, do you consider those types of issues?

Mr Lane: The advertising of the strategic bushfire management plan community consultations was widespread not only in relation to letterbox drops, which did prove very successful, but also through the fact that we advertised through print media, and utilised broadcast media as well, to get the message out. Do we get to everyone every time as much as we would like? No. It is one of our challenges.

I think, though, that the success of the community consultation sessions was that we received more people than ever to the strategic bushfire management plan meeting, even though we had been to two previous iterations, in 2004-05 and again in 2009. We got a lot more community feedback this time, which very much impressed upon me some of the things that we put into the draft plan going forward. Whilst we did not get to as many people as we would like, the way we conducted the sessions certainly allowed us to really draw out those priorities that the community saw as important.

In relation to areas like Tharwa, we have visited there not only through the SBMP consultation but also through the visits to the southern rural fire brigade, picking up on as many community members from that area as we could. We also got good representation, strong rural representation, at some of the other community consultation events. And we had representatives of that constituency also involved on the planning committee of the SBMP version 3.

THE CHAIR: Just to go back to where I started, minister, Dr Cooper, when she appeared, also said:

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.”

One of her officers then went on to say:

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.

The question would be, minister, are we going to approach this on the need rather than have the resourcing driving the issue; and will you address the deficit, as the Auditor-General’s Office sees that exists at the moment in the current SBMP?

Mr Corbell: The government said very clearly in relation to recommendation 2 from the auditor that we will release and make explicit a statement of resources needed to meet the objectives of the SBMP version 2. We said that we would do that for the last Assembly sitting last year, and we have done so.

THE CHAIR: It is not a particularly explicit list, though.

Mr Corbell: It is a pretty explicit list. It does list all the capabilities across rural fire, fire and rescue, parks brigade as part of rural fire and a range of other capabilities that the government has. This new statement of resources will also be included in the development of version 3 of the SBMP and the government takes seriously the need to make that list of resourcing available.

The commissioner has talked through well some of the nuances around this issue. The day-to-day emergency response—that is, the frequency of event that we generally see in the ACT—is very well covered by our existing level of capability. The challenge, of course, is: how do you make explicit the resources you need for the high end, less frequent but most significant emergency, which is the severe or catastrophic fire event? As the commissioner has said, in those scenarios you can never have enough. The point that was made about the Blue Mountains is a point well made. The New South Wales Rural Fire Service had queues of fire appliances trying to get into the Blue Mountains but it still was not enough. That is because of the intensity and the very short time in which one of these fire emergencies can emerge and have an impact.

That is the issue that we have to address in terms of the statement of resources. Yes, we can assess and be confident about our level of capability for the day-to-day regular frequency event. I think we are very confident about the capacity we have on the ground to respond to those types of regular frequency events. But the high end, high impact event, the severe or catastrophic event, is another question altogether, and it is very difficult to quantify what a 2003 event means in terms of the number of vehicles. We would be naive to say we can determine the number of vehicles and the number of personnel we need to deal with a 2003-type event. I do not think you can do it. So the approach that the ESA is adopting is very cognisant of some of those issues.

THE CHAIR: I understand Mr McGuffog, when he worked for RFS and ESA, did a needs-based analysis. Is it possible that we could have a copy of that document?

Mr Corbell: I am not aware of that but I am happy to make inquiries and provide an answer to the committee.

THE CHAIR: That is kind. In terms of resources, how many paid FTE does the RFS currently have and how many staff are on duty?

Mr Corbell: ACT RFS currently have 14 FTE funded, including the RFS Chief Officer. Of these, 12 are currently assigned to ACT RFS headquarters and two are assigned to the strategic bushfire management plan project.

THE CHAIR: Are the two assigned to the SBMP effectively, therefore, offline?

Mr Lane: Certainly not. They are very much online, and that is one of the key objectives we need to achieve for what is strong—and recognised again in the Auditor-General's report as strong—bushfire planning policy. The SBMP is critical to the delivery of that policy. The work of the two project officers, in undertaking the strategic bushfire management plan version 3, very much contributes to the role of

assisting the Rural Fire Service in achieving its outcomes. It certainly is doing more than that in terms of that project team in relation to some of those things the minister has already raised, such as the establishment even further of a stronger community education and doorknock program that will be undertaken later this year, which they do anyway on a daily basis as part of the RFS effort. So it is not as if they are a separate entity in their own right; they work very closely with the RFS on that.

Of course, it must be recognised also that this particular project team and the policy work covers off the liaison back into the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate, other directorates such as Environment and Planning Directorate and the work that needs to be undertaken to assist the ACT Fire & Rescue service to deliver its response into the built-up area of the city as well. So it is very much a collective effort. It is very much about recognising that, to meet our objectives, this particular project needs to be resourced to bring it to fruition.

THE CHAIR: That is the point that you make—it needs to be resourced to bring it to fruition. If we have two officers working full time on the SBMP, who is doing the job that they would normally do?

Mr Lane: The efforts are shared collectively, as I said. So we continue to meet the priorities, whether it is assisting the RFS in other relevant areas of its work, such as its fleet and procurement area through the ESA support services. Additionally, in relation to things such as training, we have the ESA training team working closely with the RFS on the delivery of training objectives. In other words, as I said before, it is a collective effort based on the resourcing that we continue to have, and we continue to meet our objectives, such as, importantly, the delivery, as I am sure the community would expect, of a new strategic bushfire plan with significant policy issues such as the development of bushfire prone areas.

THE CHAIR: Of the 14 FTE, what turnover of staff was there in, say, the last financial year?

Mr Corbell: We would not have that detail immediately to hand, Mr Smyth, but I can take it on notice.

THE CHAIR: That is kind. How many volunteers have we trained and have ready to go on 1 October?

Mr Corbell: I will ask Mr Stark, Chief Officer, RFS, to respond to that, Mr Smyth.

Mr Stark: The membership of brigades continues to change on a day-by-day basis. We have people joining all of our brigades. On approximately 1 July we had 568 volunteers and 164 members of the parks brigade available as a resource for the upcoming fire season, which is significant growth over all the brigades over the last five years, from membership levels that were in the low 300s in 2009. This membership growth is based around the work that has been done to support brigades, engage them in training and to provide value into community service to the Canberra community and beyond through membership of rural fire brigades.

THE CHAIR: The Auditor-General made mention that availability of appliances on

the first day of the fire season was variable. Will all appliances be fully operational on 1 October this year?

Mr Stark: Absolutely. There is a scheduled process for the maintenance of vehicles and the inspection of equipment. All brigades, RFS, including the parks brigade and Fire & Rescue firefighters, ensure that their appliances and equipment are kept to the highest standard every day of the year for a turnout. Particularly, we have put in place a documented process to ensure that on 1 October every piece of equipment and every vehicle has been checked prior to the season, and that is proceeding as scheduled and will be completed for this year.

THE CHAIR: The Auditor-General also made comment about the fitness and training of the volunteers. Will all volunteers have passed their mandatory fitness tests prior to the start of the fire season?

Mr Stark: They will have.

Mr Corbell: They will have undertaken it, Mr Smyth. Whether they pass is not entirely within the government's hands.

THE CHAIR: All the testing will be done by 1 October?

Mr Stark: The ACT Rural Fire Service is the only volunteer fire service that has fitness testing in place for its volunteers. It is done to a national standard through two types of test—a moderate test or an arduous test. That is done on an annual cycle basis now which relates to the timing of when people first joined and conducted that fitness test as part of their basic training. So at any point in time every member of the Rural Fire Service has done a fitness test within the last 12 months, which makes them operationally available for the fire season. Fitness testing continues now throughout the year, and our SOPs have been updated to reflect that the fitness testing is not an event that happens during September but is on a cyclic basis, making sure that people are available.

THE CHAIR: There was mention of a training needs analysis. Have we ever conducted a training needs analysis on RFS, and is all the appropriate training being undertaken?

Mr Stark: There is a training needs analysis of all members against the new national framework under the public VETtrak training program for all the competencies that have been identified for rural firefighting, showing both the areas where we have people trained against those competencies and where any gaps might be—the number of people against the particular competency—and which shows the analysis of the training program that we then develop to make sure that we cover all those areas. The gaps may be in some of the specialist skills, such as village firefighting or other things, which has been a new program that has only been implemented over the last three to five years.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible for the committee to have a copy of the training needs analysis?

Mr Corbell: I will take that on notice, Mr Smyth. I will get some advice from ESA about that.

THE CHAIR: This is the last question I have in this round: how many incident controllers does the service require and do we have a full complement of incident controllers at the various levels of training?

Mr Lane: I am happy to answer that, thanks, minister. We certainly have a full complement. I can get you the exact details of numbers of those, which I do not have right at hand at the moment.

THE CHAIR: That would be kind.

Mr Lane: In essence, we have taken advice from the ACT Bushfire Council in relation to what would be the expectation of a minimum need—recognising, of course, that, as a relatively small jurisdiction, we cannot always have a sustained long-term incident management team that could go for weeks and weeks without support, as I said before, by way of interstate or commonwealth assistance.

The benchmark that the Bushfire Council established is that we should be able to run two full incident management teams for at least a 48-hour period to allow for that initial stand-up, and recognising the scenario that the vast majority of fires that we see in the territory are burnt through or extinguished within that time. We know there are those exceptional circumstances, like we saw in January 2003, which turns into what we call a campaign fire, where we require additional effort. But in terms of meeting the objectives as set by the Bushfire Council, we have the current complement of incident controllers and the core functions of the incident management team to meet that objective.

We will continue to improve that with additional training and the exercising that the minister spoke about before to ensure that we continue to maintain those high levels and grow that where required.

THE CHAIR: And you will supply that list?

Mr Lane: We will supply you with the numbers.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much.

MS PORTER: Minister, with regard to recommendations 16 and 17, they are not complete, obviously, at the moment. Could you update us on those two recommendations, please.

Mr Corbell: Recommendation 16 deals with the farm firewise program. The Auditor-General recommended that there should be a review of farm firewise. The government agreed with that recommendation, and the ESA continues to review the operations of farm firewise to ensure that we are continuing to get a good level of engagement across rural lessees and that appropriate mitigation activities are occurring on rural leases in the ACT.

The farm firewise plan that a rural lessee has in place needs to meet the requirement for the rural lease, a bushfire operational plan. The ACT RFS is supporting landholders to develop farm management plans through the farm firewise program. The priority is to support the development of these plans to meet BOP requirements on rural leases within the bushfire abatement zone—so those rural lessees that are on the interface between the urban area and the more rural areas of the ACT. The new farm firewise plan is designed to demonstrate compliance and conformance with bushfire mitigation activities on leased land within the BAZ, the bushfire abatement zone. A process is being implemented by ACT RFS to ensure clarity around the relationship between farm firewise and its link to land management agreements that rural lessees also have obligations under. That work is ongoing. We continue to see a high level of engagement amongst rural lessees with the farm firewise program; it really has been a very successful program.

In relation to recommendation 17, that deals with the community fire unit program. The Auditor-General identified the need for some improvements in relation to governance and administrative documentation around the administration of the community fire unit program and also making sure that SOPs, standard operating procedures, were up to date and there was effective operational guidance for volunteers participating in the program.

So it was largely governance and administrative issues that the Auditor-General asked to be updated. The government agreed with that recommendation. We have now ensured that training records are up to date. Recording systems have been revised in accordance with the Territory Records Act. Stock, equipment and PPE databases have also been updated as a result of the recent audit report, and governance arrangements, processes and procedures have been reviewed. Revised draft standards and protocols, and a 2014-15 business plan, are currently subject to consultation with the Community Fire Unit Consultative Committee. So that has been a useful recommendation to bring some governance and administrative matters up to date, and that is a good thing for the health of the CFU program.

MS PORTER: Just a couple of questions. With regard to the farm firewise program, you said it has been extremely successful. What do you do in response to a rural landholder—I do not have an example; I am not saying that this has occurred—who has a property within that bushfire abatement zone who is resistant to becoming involved?

Mr Corbell: It is unusual for that to happen, but there can be instances where perhaps a rural leaseholder is not necessarily resistant but is busy and has other things that they feel they need to do. The challenge for the personnel of RFS is to engage with the rural lessee; to talk them through the issues; to build a relationship; and to build an understanding that this is important, it is a priority, and we are there to help them—that the RFS farm firewise program is there to help them make sure their property is safer when it comes to fire. It is an educative approach. It is a collaborative approach. It is not a heavy-handed approach, because that ultimately is not always the best way to get a good level of compliance and good outcomes.

The ACT RFS has worked very closely with rural lessees, and the personnel who are engaged in the farm firewise program have been employed because they have a good

understanding of how to engage with rural lessees to get that collaborative approach that is needed for fire fuel management.

Ultimately, under the act there are powers available to the RFS chief officer, and to the commissioner and the chief officer of Fire & Rescue, if they are concerned about fuel build-up, in particular, on privately leased land in the territory. But the first step is always collaborative and educative in trying to achieve a good level of fire fuel management.

MS PORTER: Because it is critical, as you just pointed out, that that link between the urban fringe and the bushland is managed.

Mr Corbell: Yes, but I have to say that, overwhelmingly, there is a very good level of understanding and activity on the part of rural lessees in terms of their fire fuel management.

MS PORTER: With regard to the CFUs, under the new community engagement arrangements that you were talking about before, going into the areas that you were discussing, you were saying you were going to utilise the CFU in some of those doorknocking things. I know that is something they are very familiar with already, and they initiate some of that themselves, in the area that I work with, anyway. Is it envisaged that there will be some additional CFUs under that new plan?

Mr Corbell: The development of new CFUs is subject to assessment and advice to the government from the ESA through ACT Fire & Rescue, which has responsibility for the program. My view is that I take advice from Fire & Rescue and the ESA about the demand or need for additional CFUs, and that is a matter that we keep under review.

MS PORTER: There have been some questions asked about the information that has gone out to the community about ember drop zones—and some anxiety, I think, around that. People are responding by saying, “We need to have a CFU in this area because it has now been declared an ember drop zone.” How are we going to respond to that anxiety in the community?

Mr Corbell: The language of “ember zone” was used in previous versions of the SBMP. That will be replaced now with the designation of those parts of the urban area which are bushfire prone. That means they are subject potentially to ember attack or, in some circumstances, direct flame attack in the event of a bushfire. We will be changing that terminology to make it more consistent—indeed, to make it consistent with national standards around designation of vulnerable areas in the urban built-up area.

It is not the case that, if you are in a bushfire-prone area, every street has a CFU. That is not practical or necessary. In many instances, the designation of a bushfire-prone area really is an alert to the need to make sure you maintain your property so that it is bushfire ready: so that you are taking the simple, practical, well-understood steps that authorities regularly communicate—about making sure that your garden is not a potential bed for or vulnerable to ember attack, for example; that you are keeping your home well maintained; that you are cleaning your gutters; that you are removing

undergrowth around your property; and so on. It is simple measures like that, along with having a bushfire plan for yourself and your family.

Those are the simple steps that we need to take in the event of living in a bushfire-prone area. The community fire units are an additional capability. Their location is based on assessments made by Fire & Rescue about particular vulnerabilities and where the greatest benefits are to locate those CFU units.

MS PORTER: I had a question around engagement with key community groups such as peak bodies in the ACT. I remember that back in 2003 there was very important work that happened in engaging with these peak bodies, in particular, the bodies that would be working with the community on the ground in many instances. Has that work continued, and has it been part of BP 3 that that will be continued and strengthened?

Mr Corbell: It certainly feeds into SBMP 3, but it is also part of the broader emergency planning of the ESA. I think you are referring to engagement with volunteer groups, Volunteering ACT—

MS PORTER: Red Cross.

Mr Corbell: Very much around the recovery aspect of fire.

MS PORTER: The recovery stage, yes.

Mr Corbell: A lot of work has happened in this space. Just this week, the ACT and commonwealth governments announced funding to a range of community-based organisations. Some \$5.2 million worth of funding was announced this week to a range of community-based bodies around natural disaster resilience. That includes funding to groups like Volunteering ACT, to continue to develop and maintain their volunteer engagement arrangements so that we have a standby list of people we can call on, in the event of emergency, to assist with key volunteering tasks. It is similar with the Red Cross and the Green Cross organisation, which has developed some special capability in this area as well.

Groups like Southside Community Services are receiving funding through the latest funding round to develop emergency response planning for the Oaks Estate community, because of the particular vulnerabilities of that community, in terms of both the risks that community faces around flooding and inundation, which is fairly unique for the ACT but still a vulnerability in that community, and the fact that that community has a broad demographic, including people who are more vulnerable and less likely to be well prepared, because of their age or socioeconomic status. So a range of programs and grant-based schemes are in place and are continually being supported and developed in this area.

We are also working very closely with the multicultural community, recognising that there are people whose first language is not English, whose English is poor or who simply do not have sufficient English language skills to understand and respond to emergency warnings. Work is occurring in that space as well, about how we get messages out to people who are perhaps vulnerable, who are isolated in their homes,

where English is not the first language. These are important areas that are under constant development too.

MS PORTER: As part of the discussion that you are having and the preparedness of these community groups, is there a plan to be able to get out to the community, through that communication plan that you have, an adequate response in relation to wanting to help? As you know, a lot of the resources of the ESA were tied up managing people who were turning up at the door wanting to help. That tied up officers at that time considerably, I recall.

Mr Lane: We recognise that that has been an issue in the past, which is why ESA has partnered with Volunteering ACT, very much in relation to getting better organised. We know that there is tremendous community spirit that comes together in times of need and emergency. Volunteering ACT have done tremendous work in relation to creating a database by which they can capture those people that may well be interested in doing that beforehand. But also, equally—more importantly, really—when a disaster has occurred, there is a place for people to register their interest in support, with the skills, resources or other elements that they could bring to that, either as individuals or members of the business community.

We will rely very much on Volunteering ACT at that particular time should that occur. What we are doing over these coming months is utilising that particular database to possibly pre-emptively attempt to do what we want to do—that is, ask for volunteers within the community who may be interested in helping us with things like a doorknocking campaign, letterbox drops or those sorts of things so that we can utilise, even more, individuals within the community. And, as we pointed out before, there are community groups that may well be interested in assisting with such an important program as well.

For this particular year, we do not want to start off too big, but we want to hopefully grow on something that picks up on the importance of using the community effort on this very important matter.

MS PORTER: Thank you very much.

MS LAWDER: I have a couple of follow-up questions. Firstly, you mentioned working with rural lessees. Does that include lessees who are not farmers? Offhand I think of the tracking station at Tidbinbilla, Camp Cottermouth, Greenhills Conference Centre. Does the RFS work with those organisations as well, and how frequently?

Mr Lane: Yes, it certainly does, through various arrangements, some of which are based upon the feedback from the Auditor-General's report and which we have picked up in the new SBMP version 3. They recognise three broad elements of the community. One, of course, is the rural leaseholders themselves and the program that we have got in place in relation to the farm firewise program, recognising commonwealth land managers in areas like Tidbinbilla and the like and the agreed position we have with those commonwealth land managers to also develop bushfire operational plans for those areas but also picking up on other community groups or elements where there is land managed and where we have close liaison with organisers of areas like Camp Cottermouth. We think we have covered everyone off

in relation to that in a planning sense, and we will continue to work closely across those three areas as well as ACT government land managers as well.

Mr Corbell: I think it is worth highlighting that on the ground there is a good level—I just relay this from my personal experience—of communication between, for example, venue operators like Camp Cottermouth and their local RFS brigades. In the RFS brigade I am a member of, for example, which is just up the road from Camp Cottermouth, there is a good level of day-to-day communication. If there is an event on—there are going to be 300 scouts at Camp Cottermouth, it is going to be a hot weekend, fire danger is going to be high—the local brigade is aware of that and is aware of the particular issues that it needs to be cognisant of in terms of a large number of kids in that location. These are the types of practical conversations that are happening at a grassroots level which are important in terms of the actual response and preparedness in the event of a fire.

MS LAWDER: On the community fire unit program—obviously I should declare that I am a member of a CFU as well—in numerous instances you talk about reviewing operating procedures et cetera. When there were hazard reduction burns, there was a process of an SMS to CFU members in advance. For example, last Friday there was a hazard reduction burn at Pine Island but there was not prior notice. I imagine these sorts of incidents actually create more calls to your call centre when people do not get that prior notice?

Mr Lane: Examples such as the Pine Island hazard reduction, which occurred last Friday, Saturday and Sunday, were published, once again, through broadcast media and on our ESA website. We occasionally utilise the opportunity—

MS LAWDER: You have to look it up rather than pushing a message out?

Mr Lane: Yes. The key when we are looking to utilisation of CFUs is particularly in those areas where the prescribed burns are right at the back of the houses where there is a CFU actually utilised. We are mindful that CFUs, as you would be aware, have a prescribed area and are very much trained to be able to stay within that area to protect the houses in that particular street or precinct. They are not mobile units as such to go out beyond those areas.

We will continue to look at better methods of communication with all of our volunteers, and that is something where we are looking to provide opportunity as to how we can do that even more so. We know CFU members are great advocates within our community for things like describing why prescribed burning is so important and we know that we need to utilise our volunteers so that they can get to other members in their streets so that they understand why there is some smoke in the air at that particular time.

MS LAWDER: Finally, you talked about messages in languages other than English. I was interested to find out that recommendation 24 was: complete testing of public information communication systems. Do you separately keep a register of, for example, people who are deaf or hearing impaired to SMS messages?

Mr Lane: We are, through national agreements for the hearing impaired and the like,

an agreed signatory to how we can best provide that information, particularly in a broadcast media sense once again. If we are utilising television as an opportunity for broadcasting messages, we will have people available to visually sign those messages for the hearing impaired at that time as well as picking up on the normal things that we would do in relation to our text messaging, which are available, of course, to the hearing impaired and basically on the information on our website.

In relation to your question about other languages, we do have the Google interpreter system on our ESA website which meets, again, agreed standards so that we cover off the vast majority of languages there for our key safety messages. And we do have, based upon advice from the Community Services Directorate, a number of print materials available for those people in other languages as well—not everyone, of course, but those that we think cover the majority of those areas in the city where those things may be important.

MS LAWDER: When you do television advertising, do you have open captions on them for people who have a hearing impairment?

Mr Lane: ESA do not undertake specifically television advertising as such. We utilise our local media sources. If we see a need in the future to undertake some sort of a television advertising campaign, we would certainly be keen to make sure we captured all elements of the community through that process.

MS LAWDER: One of the issues I have had remarked on to me many times is often in an emergency there is an interpreter provided—and it is certainly not an emergency services issue—but often the broadcaster zeros in on that presenter, not including the interpreter, which is a real issue for people. But that is not your fault.

Mr Lane: Again, that is why there have been national agreements reached in relation to those sorts of matters that broadcasters are much more mindful of. It does not always happen, depending on the situation, but we think, as the minister spoke of before in terms of the establishment of our media facility at ESA Fairbairn, we are well equipped to cover those types of things. Subject to ensuring we do have a register, again through government, of those people that can undertake that role for us, we will utilise that at that time.

MS PORTER: A quick supplementary: if you recall, in 2003 there were a number of people with disabilities who were unable to leave their home at that particular time when they should have evacuated. Have we got some way of knowing where people with disabilities—I know that is really hard—are actually located in streets in vulnerable areas now?

Mr Lane: It was one of the things we looked at, very much so. It was a very important issue that we looked at through the SBMP planning process. We have established good dialogue with the Community Services Directorate on that, and one of the areas that we will be targeting, focused on what the minister announced before in relation to the \$5.2 million funding, is actually money towards the Community Services Directorate for just such things.

The challenge is, of course: do we really know where all the people at risk or

vulnerable are outside what is on government registers and the like? And that is what we have not quite been able to achieve as yet.

Mr Corbell: If I can, I took on notice earlier today a question about numbers of incident controllers. I can provide some further advice on that. I am advised that there are currently 51 level II and level III incident controllers across the ESA, including all RFS brigades, including the parks brigade. The number of level II incident controllers is 30. The number of level III incident controllers is 21.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Just before we finish up, the Auditor-General, when she appeared, made mention of the memorandum of understanding between TAMS and ESA and the fact that it had not been signed. You mentioned that recommendation 18 had now been completed. Is there now a signed MOU between parks brigade and the ACT Rural Fire Service?

Mr Lane: The MOU was, in fact, signed in 2013, and it covered off that question that the Auditor-General did raise. Recently, in preparation for this coming fire season, the schedules which outline the operational resources within the MOU have been updated and checked for availability for the coming fire season. And regardless of the fact that the MOU was not signed at the time that the audit was conducted, we continue to have high-level coordination and liaison with Territory and Municipal Services through the Parks and Conservation Service on all aspects of firefighting, with a specific emphasis on the collaborative training efforts and combined exercises that we do.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible for the committee to have a copy of the MOU and the schedules?

Mr Corbell: Again, I will take that on notice and provide an answer to the committee.

THE CHAIR: Just to finish up, there is a section on page 10 of the report of the Bushfire Council, and it says that the lack of governance procedure and documentation in place for the council increase the risk that the council is ineffective in fulfilling its role and responsibility. There was something circulated and signed off within a month, which the auditor raised an eyebrow over. That might be the expression. It goes on to say that there is inadequate consultation between ESA and the council over the review and scope of the effectiveness of the SBMP. There are a number of things that perhaps have not been done.

What is the relationship between you, minister, and ESA as well with the council? Is the council adequately resourced to carry out its functions? And is the council's advice taken on board and acted upon by both you, minister, and ESA?

Mr Corbell: Speaking from my perspective, as minister, I enjoy a good relationship with the Bushfire Council and its members and meet regularly or receive formal advice regularly from the chair of the Bushfire Council, Mr Jeffery. In particular, I have a standing reference to the Bushfire Council to provide me with a yearly update on preparedness and responsive planning for the forthcoming bushfire season. I receive that regularly from them and I am always quick to respond to matters that the council brings to my attention. So I treat their advice seriously and ensure that it is addressed where it needs to be by ACT RFS or ESA more generally.

In terms of the support provided to the Bushfire Council, it is the responsibility of ACT RFS to provide that support to the Bushfire Council in terms of secretariat function. And I am confident that RFS continue to take the necessary steps to provide that support.

Mr Lane: Further to that, I highly value the support and advice that I do receive from the ACT Bushfire Council and I regularly, as I am able to under the legislation, seek specific advice from the council in relation to bushfire matters, particularly in relation to the development of the new strategic bushfire management plan version 3. The planning committee of that had ACT Bushfire Council representation specifically on it, and when the draft version was prepared I specifically met with council to take them through it and seek their advice and feedback on that.

I seek also advice from council on things such as the development of regional fire management plans, advice from council in relation to things like the TAMS bushfire operation plan so that I can be assured, given the level of expertise that the council has, that we are addressing the broader issues that the community would be interested in in relation to bushfire planning and policy and the actions that are undertaken by the operational services or the land managers.

THE CHAIR: We might leave it there, it being 11 o'clock. Thank you, minister, and your officials for appearing today and the answers that you have given. We have a number of questions taken on notice. There is no deadline but perhaps if we said two weeks from today that would be a normal expectation. When the transcript is available it will be forwarded to all those who have spoken today that they might check and suggest any corrections should they need to do so. With that, I formally declare the public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 11 am.