

# DISSENTING STATEMENT OF MS ROSALIE WOODRUFF MP, MEMBER FOR FRANKLIN

## Inquiry into the State Fire Commission

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### 1. General Comments

The Inquiry into the State Fire Commission was established in October 2015 to report on an extensive Terms of Reference. This was an important Inquiry that was established in part to investigate the funding and governance arrangements for the Tasmanian Fire Service and the State Emergency Service. It was also constituted to investigate other Terms of Reference. Relevant to this Dissenting Statement are the Terms:

- (1)(a)(v) the funding of the Fuel Reduction Burn Program,
- (1)(a)(vi) community safety programs,
- (1)(a)(vii) fire service resources including firefighter numbers,
- (1)(c) the future finding arrangements for the TFS, and
- (1)(d) the need for appropriate and modern governance practices in the State Fire Commission.

The Committee of the Inquiry into the State Fire Commission (the Committee) did not seek evidence from Forestry Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service, two of the three agencies most closely involved in bushfire management in Tasmania. Neither of these organisations provided written comment or appeared as witnesses.

In light of the critical inter-connection between these three agencies – Forestry Tasmania, Parks, and the TFS – in fuel reduction, the resourcing of bushfire fighting, and in ensuring community safety, this lack of evidence has meant it has not been possible to properly investigate the Terms of Reference listed above.

The summer 2016 fires in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and the devastating, irreversible and unprecedented impacts that occurred there, transpired during the course of this Inquiry – although prior to witnesses appearing to provide evidence. Given the lack of information from Parks and Forestry Tasmania, the Committee was not able to properly reflect on and respond to the circumstances of these fires.

This is a huge missed opportunity. The scale of those fires and the level of resourcing that was mounted, from state, interstate, and overseas sectors was unparalleled in Tasmania. Many questions about timing, coordination and resourcing have been raised in the community, and were tangentially raised in the Inquiry, but were not properly investigated or answered.

Given the expected increase in bushfires in coming summers due to climate change, from lightning strikes, heat, and dryness, it is a priority that Tasmania grapples with the realities before us. Clearly, our response this summer was not adequate given the conditions that occurred, and there are many ways our prevention, protection and response systems can – and have to be – improved. We have lives, communities, and natural values to protect.

## **2. Findings**

On the basis of the evidence presented, this Dissenting Statement finds that:

- 2.1 There appears to have been a significant under-resourcing in the ability of the Parks and Wildlife Service to undertake the required level of fuel reduction burns within PWS properties.
- 2.2 There appears to have been a significant loss of resources and expertise that used to previously be supplied by Forestry Tasmania to the bushfire fighting effort.
- 2.3 The devastation of the summer 2016 bushfires on TWWHA vegetation have raised questions about the timeframes within which the TFS engages interstate and international fire fighting resources, the communication protocols guiding this engagement, and the firefighting resourcing required within the state.
- 2.4 The impact of global warming on weather conditions is resulting in increasingly narrow time periods each year within which fuel-reduction burns can be safely conducted.
- 2.5 There are low literacy levels across Tasmania (estimated to be greater than 50%) that present significant resourcing challenges in the education of communities about bushfire risk.

- 2.6 There is not enough knowledge about the number of households in high-risk bushfire areas with a household Bushfire Management Plan, the changing risk profile in rural communities given changing demographics, or the reasons people fail to enact a Plan during a fire event.

### **3. Recommendations**

On the basis of the Findings listed, this Dissenting Statement recommends that:

- 3.1 Parliament re-constitute the Inquiry into the State Fire Commission and properly complete the task of investigating and reporting on the Terms of Reference, specifically including the evidence of Forestry Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service.
- 3.2 A formal investigation be conducted into the level of resourcing required for the Parks and Wildlife Service to conduct fuel reduction burns, within Parks' properties, of the right frequency, intensity, place and time.
- 3.3 A formal investigation be conducted into resources and expertise that were previously supplied by Forestry Tasmania into the bushfire fighting effort, and the impact of this loss on the fire management program within Forestry and Parks areas.
- 3.4 A review be undertaken into the conditions and timeframes within which the TFS engages interstate and international fire fighting resources, including the communication protocols and management requirements needed to engage and support these sectors.
- 3.5 The TFS assess the impact of global warming on management practices in relation to the timing and intensity of fuel-reduction burns.
- 3.6 Community education about bushfire risk and protection be focused around face-to-face delivery, and local volunteers be trained and supported in effective education techniques.
- 3.7 The TFS establish targets for all households in high-risk bushfire areas to have household Bushfire Management Plans.

**Dr Rosalie Woodruff MP**  
**Greens Member for Franklin**