

Ministerial Statement



Hon Carmel Zollo

Minister for
Emergency Services
Minister for
Correctional Services
Minister for Road Safety
Minister Assisting the Minister for
Multicultural Affairs

Tuesday, 17 June 2008

WANGARY CORONIAL INQUEST

I seek leave to make a ministerial statement about the Government's response to the Deputy Coroner's recommendations arising out of the Coronial Inquest into the Wangary bushfires.

On 18 December, 2007 the Deputy Coroner Anthony Schapel handed down his findings into the bushfires on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, known as the 'Wangary Bushfires'.

I advised the Chamber on 12 February that a working party, headed by Mr David Place, Commissioner of Fire and Emergencies, had been established to examine and consider the Deputy Coroner's recommendations

Membership of the working party consisted of representatives from:

- SA Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM)
- SA Country Fire Service (CFS)
- SA Metropolitan Fire Service
- SA State Emergency Service (SES)
- South Australia Police
- Department for Environment and Heritage

- ForestrySA
- Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA
- Local Government Association
- Office of Local Government
- SA Farmers' Federation
- Department of Treasury and Finance
- Attorney-General's Department
- Department for Transport Energy and Infrastructure
- SA Country Fire Service Volunteers' Association
- Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation.

I would like to thank the members of the Wangary Coronial Inquest Working Party for their work and advice.

The Working Party provided advice to Government and the Government is now in a position to outline its response to each of the 34 recommendations.

The Government response will be publicly available from this afternoon.

As previously advised, any legislative changes required will be incorporated into the current work being progressed as part of the review of the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005*.

The implementation of non-legislative recommendations will continue to be co-ordinated by the Commissioner of Fire and Emergencies in conjunction with the Wangary Coronial Inquest Working Party representatives over the coming months.

The majority of the outstanding recommendations are anticipated to be completed before the next Fire Danger Season.

As announced, the 2008/09 Budget will include new funding of an additional \$15.930 million, over four years, to increase aerial fire fighting capacity in South Australia, which will include:

- A large capacity fire fighting helicopter, such as an Aircrane, to be based in South Australia during the bushfire season.
- An upgrade of fire retardant mixing infrastructure for aerial fire fighting.
- Additional staffing for the safe and effective management of air operations.
- Establishment of bulk water supplies at strategic airstrips.

The large capacity helicopter will be in addition to the existing aerial fire fighting fleet.

Already, over the last few years, when the need has arisen the Rann Labor Government has made funds available to use the nationally shared type 1 large capacity helicopters. Indeed, during the December Kangaroo Island bushfires, South Australia utilised the services of two of these type of aircraft.

The bushfire risk to South Australia, due to continuing dry conditions, is very real and was demonstrated during the 2007-08 season with significant fires on Kangaroo Island and at Belair, Williamstown and Willunga.

South Australia's expenditure on fire fighting aircraft has increased significantly since the election of the first Rann Labor Government. Under the previous Liberal Government a dismal \$831,000 was allocated to our State's aerial capacity while in 2008-09 \$6.795 million has been budgeted for, representing an almost a \$6 million increase since the former Liberal Government.

Further funding of \$2.85 million has also been announced to meet additional recommendations including funding for additional training for Incident Management Team personnel, as well as funding for an Operations Planning Officer (CFS based) to co-ordinate Incident Management Training and ensure all personnel are appropriately skilled. Funding will also provide an Emergency Management Officer (SES based) to liaise between agencies and local councils to provide a more co-ordinated approach to prevention, all hazards planning activities and community warning systems, and to meet key recommendations arising from the Inquest.

The Government's response to the report identifies that of the 34 recommendations, 14 have already been implemented and are deemed complete and 20 are in the process of being implemented.

The Commissioner of Fire and Emergencies has established a small task group and project team to ensure that the rest of the recommendations are implemented to completion.

In addition to the work to implement the recommendations of the Deputy Coroner, work is underway to prepare for the implementation of recommendations of the Bushfire Management Review.

This review focussed on approaching bushfire management through prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to ensure reduced bushfire risk and community sustainability and resilience.

Aspects of the Deputy Coroner's recommendations touch on work already in train to implement the Bushfire Management Review.

As previously advised, legislative changes arising from the Deputy Coroner's recommendations, the Bushfire Management Review and the Review of the Operation of the *Fire and Emergency Services Act* by John Murray will be dealt with together.

As we move forward with the implementation of changes to our bushfire management practices, the Country Fire Service will take steps to ensure that structures are in place for the coming Fire Danger Season that protect the community and allow for flexibility once the required legislative changes are enacted.

With respect to the development of a code of practice for the management of native vegetation, a separate task group comprising of representatives from the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, South Australian Farmers' Federation, South Australian Country Fire Service, Department for Environment and Heritage, Native Vegetation Council, Local Government Association and Conservation Council of South Australia are currently working under the Wangary Coronial Inquest Working Party on this recommendation.

The task group have commenced working on a draft code titled: *Code of practice for the management of native vegetation to reduce the impact of bushfire*.

Consultation by the task group is ongoing with a view to providing a draft Code of Practice to the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Environment and Conservation in July 2008.

As was mentioned by the Deputy Coroner, since the Wangary fire, the Country Fire Service has engaged in a period of constant improvement with the Bob Smith Independent Review, Project Phoenix, and the Bushfire Management

Review. A great number of changes have been implemented and have been in operation over the past two Fire Danger Seasons.

In addition, our fire-fighters are well trained and better resourced than ever before with improvements in training, increases in funding and the provision of protective clothing and new equipment that is the envy of other services across the Country.

In closing it is also important to acknowledge the efforts of the thousands of dedicated volunteers of the Country Fire Service who give of their time freely to protect and serve the community.

Copies of the Government response will be available on the SAFECOM website from this afternoon.

Once again I thank the Commissioner of Fire and Emergencies and the members of the Wangary Working Party for their efforts and advice.