

## Appendix G Previous ACT inquiries and reviews

Elements of the ACT's emergency services, particularly the urban fire service, have been the subject of various inquiries and reviews in recent years. Among the resultant reports have been the 1986 Attwood report, the 1988 Purdue report, the 1991 Hannan report, the 1992 Purdon report, the 1993 McDonald report, the 1994 McBeth report, and the 1995 Glenn report.

### The Attwood report

The Committee of Enquiry into the ACT Fire Brigade was established in 1986 following a long period of serious industrial disputation centred on actions of the then Federal Firefighter's Union concerning the appointment of a non-ACT Fire Brigade member, Mr Bill Kerr, as Fire Commissioner in 1984. The Attwood Committee comprised:

- Mr N Attwood AO, a member of the Commonwealth's Administrative Appeals Tribunal and a former Deputy Secretary of the Department of Defence
- Mr R Knowles of the Federal Firefighter's Union
- Mr R Orchard, a former Chief Officer of the Country Fire Authority of Victoria.

The Committee was assisted by a Review of Organisational Needs for the ACT Fire Brigade, conducted by Jack Cohen and Associates, which focused on the Brigade's senior structure. The Committee reported in August 1986.

The Attwood report was scathing in its criticisms. It concluded that the Brigade suffered from a legacy of neglect and deficient management as a result of being established as a separate organisation without the management and support structure to operate independently. The Brigade's problems were compounded by:

- failure to develop a proper definition and assignment of responsibilities
- inadequate training and staff development activities that might have improved its management capacity
- limited use of new technology
- generally poor relationships with other ACT emergency services
- failure to substantiate funding needs and to use available funds effectively
- failure to develop effective union–management consultative processes.

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Among the 97 recommendations were calls to:

- establish an ACT Fire Brigade Board
- develop a forward plan for major capital works, vehicles and equipment, partly with a view to improving the condition of fire stations, expanding and improving the fleet, equipment and appliances, and upgrading maintenance activities
- introduce an improved management structure
- provide industrial relations expertise, improved consultative arrangements and better personnel-management practices
- engage a consultant to review training and staff development
- develop communications and computer systems
- improve relations with other emergency services and recognise that the Fire Brigade has a legitimate role in road rescue work and hazardous materials incidents
- update the boundary defining the built-up area (related to Rural Fire Service responsibilities).

Many of the recommendations were put into effect, although there is no record of the degree of implementation. The Fire Brigade Board was abolished by ministerial decision in 1988.

## The Purdue report

The need for improved management training in the ACT Fire Brigade was emphasised in the Attwood report. The then Fire Commissioner commissioned a review by WA Purdue and Associates, who produced a substantial report in December 1988. The report presented a comprehensive model for management development, which was taken into account in developing a subsequent approach to training. The Federal Firefighter's Union declined to participate in the review because of differences between it and the Fire Commissioner.

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## The Hannan report

The Hannan Group conducted a review of the effectiveness of fire and emergency service organisations in 1991, as part of the change program in the Department of Urban Services. The terms of reference for the review did not encompass police and ambulance services. The report, presented in October 1991, emphasised that constraints on the effectiveness of the organisations related to:

- their structure—with three services, there were a variety of administrative and reporting lines and different policies in relation to service delivery
- boundaries—with responsibility for incident management varying according to the location of the incident. Control over the suppression effort would pass from one service to another during an incident but there was no clear definition of boundaries
- duplication of resources—including communication centres, administration, maintenance and repair practices, personnel administration, training and equipment—and lack of regional facilities
- varying standards among the services in relation to readiness, training, response times, discipline, uniforms and equipment
- attitude
- urban planning that concentrated on aesthetics, functionality and lifestyle, without fully taking account of preventive fire-control measures.

The Hannan report recommended that the ACT Fire Brigade, the ACT Rural Fire Service and ACT Emergency Services be merged into a new service—ACT Fire and Emergency Services—to be led by a Chief Executive with a non-statutory board and a compressed management structure.

The report was only mildly received, especially the recommendation for the merger of the urban and rural fire and emergency services. The Chief Fire Control Officer (ACT Rural Fire Service) considered a partial merger but with the operational integrity and identity being maintained. He also favoured the Bush Fire Council becoming a non-statutory liaison forum to facilitate coordination and cooperation in fire management activities. The ACT Volunteer Bushfire Brigades Association generally supported amalgamation. Emergency Services volunteers rejected the recommendation for full amalgamation but saw some scope in a partial merger, provided it was restricted to a rearrangement of the permanent staff.

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The then Fire Commissioner was in favour of full amalgamation within a two-year facilitating period. He recommended the immediate amalgamation of a number of administrative and support functions—including all training functions, personnel, and vehicle service and maintenance; the co-location of all administrative staff; the introduction of a single piece of legislation; and the establishment, in the longer term, of a broad-based Fire and Emergency Services Advisory Board.

The Chief Police Officer considered that the Hannan report was narrowly focused in relation to the handling of emergencies in the ACT. The emphasis of the report was on fire emergencies, and there was concern about the recommendation to include ACT Emergency Services in the combined organisation, given its support for the police service in its rescue role. The police considered that ACT Emergency Services should maintain its independence within the Department of Urban Services, that specific legislation supporting ACT Emergency Services should be drafted, and that the Chief Police Officer should retain the position of Territory Controller.

## The Purdon report

Government recognised the divergence of views on the issue and the need for broad community input before a decision could be made. The Purdon consultative process in 1992 found that among the people directly affected there was confusion about the impact of the Hannan recommendations. It also found that, while there were significant cultural differences between the services, there was much common ground between them in terms of the possibility of improved cost efficiencies in administration. There was also a divergence in the official views of the organisations directly affected by the Hannan recommendation for a full merger, even though all services acknowledged the need to rationalise a range of administrative and support services.

The Government considered the Hannan and Purdon reports and on 23 September 1992 the Minister for Urban Services advised relevant staff of the Government's decision not to proceed with the proposed full merger. Instead, the Government had decided that the services would be combined within one administrative organisation but with each of the services retaining its individual operational identity and statutory responsibilities. For example, the Bush Fire Council was retained, as were the arrangements relating to land management responsibilities in ACT Parks and Conservation and ACT Forests. There was general, although not unanimous, support for this sort of approach during the

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consultative process. The Government considered that this kind of administrative link was necessary in the light of the cost of the present arrangements and the effect of the administrative and cultural differences between the services on coordination and operational efficiency.

A new position of Director to head ACT Fire and Emergency Services was created. Mr Glen Gaskill was seconded to the position for 12 months to implement the new structure and prepare a three-year plan for the new entity, which dealt with the present arrangements in more detail against an appropriate budget projection. With the Government's endorsement in August 1993 of the 'Three Year Plan', the group was renamed the Emergency Management Group, with a General Manager.

## The MacDonald report

On 15 June 1993 the then ACT Minister for Urban Services announced that, as a result of a legislative motion, Mr Bruce MacDonald AM would undertake a review of emergency services in the Territory. The review was to examine aspects of the ACT's emergency services to determine the most appropriate structure for the provision of services, including whether services should be co-located or otherwise rationalised, and the most appropriate means of training and maintaining the training levels of emergency service workers.

It was also to consider and report on arrangements to improve emergency management in the ACT, in particular:

- the development of a Three Year Plan for fire and emergency services
- the creation of an ACT Emergency Management Committee
- a review of ACT hazards
- preparation of emergency management legislation
- revision of the ACT Counter Disaster Plan
- the potential for further improving arrangements between emergency response units in ACT Fire and Emergency Services, ACT Police and the ACT Ambulance Service
- long-term requirements for the delivery of emergency services in the ACT.

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The report made a total of 35 recommendations, the main ones being:

- further implementation of the Three Year Plan
- possible extension of the administrative umbrella to include ACT Police and the ACT Ambulance Service
- retention of the ACT Fire Brigade, the ACT Rural Fire Service and the Bush Fire Council under the same administrative umbrella
- development of an appropriate legislative package
- finalisation of the review of training and development
- a communications expert to be commissioned to assess future requirements across the emergency services
- improvement of the physical working conditions and equipment of emergency service and ambulance personnel
- development of a comprehensive community awareness program.

## The McBeth report

In May 1994 Mr Howard McBeth was commissioned to review the bushfire hazard–reduction practices of ACT government land management agencies, with particular emphasis on the role and functions of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. Controversy surrounded the resultant report, provided in September 1994, since it was considered that Mr McBeth did not comply with the review’s terms of reference. It was claimed that too much emphasis was given to the structural arrangements for fire suppression in the ACT, rather than focusing on the stated requirement to review current fuel-reduction practices. The Opposition of the day made a commitment to review the McBeth report if elected to government.

The report is a very prescient read following this year’s fires. Anyone interested in judging whether an event like the January bushfires could ever have been anticipated should seek out this report. A copy is held in the ACT Legislative Assembly library.

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## The Glenn report

Following an election in 1995 the Liberal Government formed the Bushfire Taskforce, chaired by Mr Graham Glenn AO, to review the ACT's bushfire fuel management practices and recommend policies and procedures for the future. The Taskforce was to take into account the McBeth report's findings.

The Taskforce's report was completed in August 1995. Among the main recommendations in relation to government land management agencies were the following:

- the ACT Bushfire Service to carry out broad-scale hazard assessment with land management agencies and to carry out finer scale assessment in consultation with the Chief Fire Control Officer
- land management agencies to give priority to hazard reduction and bushfire safety for residents in high-risk areas
- amendments to the *Bushfire Act 1936*, to include a requirement for land managers to prepare bushfire fuel management plans. Guidelines were provided on the content of the plans
- a Bushfire Fuel Management Committee to be established to approve the plans developed by land managers
- recommendations relating to smoke management for prescribed-burning procedures and practices.

The report identified the key elements of fuel management to be hazard assessment, land use planning, land management, environment and conservation and hazard reduction. The urban interface with rural and bushland area was nominated as a matter of particular concern. The Taskforce also noted the impact of the *Air Pollution Act 1994* on fuel management practices and the resulting decline in the amount of fuel reduction burning.

The Taskforce's recommendations in relation to fuel management on government-managed land resulted in amendments to the Bushfire Act; they came into force in 1996.