

Hi Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council,

This was my first fire season working in Tasmania (having previously worked on interstate fires). There were a number of areas of concern or matters that surprised me, in no particular order;

First, I spent 3 days floating around the IMT/Southern ROC;

- Both physical areas seem woefully designed for operations as an IMT/ROC. I understand they are trying to work as well as they can within a limited budget, but a dedicated management center that can fit everyone in will be required eventually.
- When I was in the ROC there was a discussion among the IC and police inspector about charging anyone that started a fire, even if accidentally. This escalated into a rigorous discussion about whether TFS did enough to publicize what a total fire ban does or doesn't include (eg a total fire ban declaration). For example, countless people called up asking if they could use a domestic lawn mower.

I was tasked with trying to find the official TFS declaration. Ultimately, the best I could come up with was this [link](#) – which was embedded several pages deep into the TFS website. Not to mention it's from the 15-16 bushfire season.

To quote the document *“On Days of Total Fire Ban, all outdoor fires are banned except electric stoves and barbecues, and gas stoves and barbecues provided they are cleared of flammable material for at least one meter. Other barbecues and portable stoves including those that use wood, charcoal or other solid or liquid fuel are banned. Work practices such as grinding, welding and cutting metal in the open are not permitted. The use of machinery for harvesting etc may be subject to restrictions or prohibited on the declaration of a total fire ban. All fire permits are automatically suspended.”*

Considering in 2016, the ABS research showed the functional literacy rate of Adult Tasmanian's is 49%

(<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2013-09-22/4962902>) combine this with hiding information deep within an outdated website, then within that putting it on the second page of an outdated PDF, it's hardly surprising there were countless fires started by lawn mowers/back yard equipment and people play blissfully unaware, largely I believe because they were legitimately unaware.

Put yourself in the shoes of a year 10 educated citizen that lives on a block of land that backs onto bushland, the ambiguous phrase of 'use of machinery for harvest, etc' leaves plenty of activities open to interpretation. I.e. if they are cutting their grass for aesthetic purposes, would a magistrate consider that 'harvesting'?

Chatting to one of the public information staff from TFS, they informed me the PDF was never updated, purely due to a lack of funds.

I have noticed in my research for this submission, the TFS has updated the website as of the 1 of March 2019 to include an 'infographic' with limited information. But I believe this needs to be extended on to included domestic yard tools.

- On a different tack, chatting to the helicopter pilots, none of them could understand why it took so long for them to be stood up. They were of the opinion, they are most effective when the fire is small. So they couldn't work out why it took several days for them to be utilized. By the time they were called in, the fires had grown to uncontrollable sizes and were not going to be easily recoverable. The direct information I received was; 'after the night of dry lightning, a reconnaissance flight should have gone out at first light the next

morning to record the fires and heli crews should have been deployed out there before lunch and everything would have been under control with 24 hours.

- Finally, the fire danger rating webpage (<http://www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pageId=colFfdiIndex>) although it is currently all green, during fire events it will often look like a Jason Pollock painting. I've studied a B.Sc. majoring in geography (aka the study of maps). Even for me, I struggled in comprehend that map from an airconditioned office. In government services, you can only walk as fast as your slowest member of society. In the TFS's cases, their lowest common denominator should be something along the lines of the stereotypical 80yr grandma living on her own. Do you think granny could decipher that map? What about from a mobile device while trying to make a pressured decision about a fire in your region? I think the answer to that would be a resounding 'no'. From my experience of the Victorian/ NSW/ QLD fire danger index seems to make much more logical sense.
- Lastly, preparation. Coming from Victoria, it's hammered into the population before the fire season, prepare a fire plan, practice it, know when to use it. Also, clean your gutters, yard and anything else that may be flammable. However, a critical item within those fire plans is information that clearly outlines 'DO NOT RELY ON MAINS WATER OR MAINS POWER SUPPLY'. Living in Tasmania for the last 4 years, I have to say, the TFS messaging is dismal at best. I barely heard or saw a single ad encouraging people to prepare for the upcoming fire season. The question I have is, why were some many Houn Valley residents relying on mains water and power for their main defense mechanisms?
- Public messaging also seemed to be very haphazard, as there were messages coming out of Cambridge IMT and Argyle St control center and as such there was double-up in messages and at the time not very coherent messages. Keeping in mind the previous point of 49% of Tasmanians being functionally illiterate, it's little use having 400-word facebook post without a map or image of the impacted area.
- In addition to the above point, the warning systems were confusing at best – even the TFS career staff I spoke to could not definitively tell me what's more urgent; an emergency warning or emergency alert. Back to the point from a few paragraphs ago, we can only walk as fast as our slowest member; so would granny be able to differentiate the two?

Kind regards,
Austen

University of Tasmania Electronic Communications Policy (December, 2014).

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