



TASMANIAN FARMERS & GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION

AFAC Review
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Dear Dr Novy,

TFGA Submission – Cronstedt Review of the Management of Bushfires during the 2018-19 Fire Season

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

Agriculture is one of the key pillars of the economy and, with the current level of support from government, are well positioned to further capitalise on the stature of Tasmanian agriculture.

The TFGA appreciates the opportunity to submit a submission regarding the 2018/19 Tasmanian Bushfires as a number of our members were personally affected.

In direct consultation with our members, the TFGA has received a substantial amount of feedback regarding our members direct experiences and suggested improvements to minimise damage caused by future bushfires, and measures to consider, bringing future bushfires under control in a shorter timeframe.

Whilst feedback from members stated that they are appreciative of the Tasmanian Fire Services efforts and support during the recent bushfires and there being a majority consensus that the evacuation plans enacted during the recent bushfires seemed to be very well organised, unfortunately there was substantive points of improvement received as well.

Please see below categorised dot points outlining examples of our member's suggestions for improvement:

Pre-Fire Preparation:

- Appropriate pre-fire measures must be implemented after the fire season concludes. This must include controlled supervised backburns in all areas of concern in Tasmania inclusive of Wilderness Protected areas throughout the year as needed.

- A Fire Prevention control action plan implemented at a community level including efficient ways of communication during fires to provide accurate information to landowners.
- Re-instating dedicated and well-resourced community fire committees that have a local knowledge of the areas to combat fires more effectively.
- Government funded forest fire training for both the Tasmanian Fire Service and local community groups including fire fighting skills in a forest environment, when to evacuate in a forest fire situation, what resources must be used in consultation with the landowner such as utilising expert stockmen to round up and evacuate livestock, education on financial value on all levels of forestry and agricultural land and building effective fire breaks in a bush environment.
- Review of the United Firefighters Union of Tasmania's policies and procedures for firefighters during a bushfire and expected performance and ability to fight bushfires. At the moment firefighters are not required to fight bushfires. If they don't who will?
- Conduct a comprehensive review of communications blackspots state-wide.
- Conduct all year round quarterly meetings with TFS, volunteer fire fighters and the local community to re-establish relationships, create clear and concise fire strategies detailing the responsibilities and expectations of each group and gaining local knowledge of communities to be utilised as a 'blueprint' to assist TFS head offices in initial fire planning strategies in conjunction with local volunteers.
- TFS to communicate how farmers can purchase superseded fire trucks and other machinery to assist landowners with fire prevention and controlling small fires in preparation for the arrival of volunteer and TFS fire brigades.
- Review of helicopter insurance (and any other insurance issues preventing access to the fire front) for landing on Crown Land during a fire.
- Review of communication of fire embargos and a closer analysis of predicted weather patterns utilising Bureau of Meteorology to be more accurate in lifting embargo's when they are not necessary.
- Complete overhaul and review of internal communications systems in head offices around the state to update and maintain the TFS website, communication via phone is correct and correlates with other communications from TFS (during the recent fires the website stated that permits were permitted when TFGA had been advised that the fire embargo was in place for Southern Tasmania. The main TFS phone number was called and the person manning the phone advised that 'if the website states that permits are permitted then it must be ok')

During the Bushfire

- TFS to fight the bushfire and not leave landowners to fend for themselves.
- Obtain clear and definitive information about location of fires and have a central point of contact locally that is equipped with accurate information, so everyone knows the 'hot spot' locations. There was a lot of misinformation during these recent bushfires which caused unnecessary panic among the community and Oatlands being told to evacuate when the fire was nowhere in the vicinity.
- Better communication with Tasmania Police to avoid delays of volunteer fire fighters reaching the fire. (there was a lengthy delay of approximately 6 hours in which the volunteers were prevented entering the fire front to assist)
- Don't leave backburns unattended
- No annual leave for key TFS staff during fires.

- Broader consultation throughout the fire event with not only volunteers and affected landowners but with local farms that have units and stockmen, local council and any other local businesses or individuals with resources.

After the Bushfire

- ‘On the ground’ analysis conducted by TFS, Volunteers and Councils to survey fire damage and record damage caused by TFS, as a result of containing the fire, such as cut fences for dozers and trucks to gain access to land, timber and logs pushed onto landowners fencing to save Crown land in which the fencing was damaged. Monetary compensation to fix the damage should be implemented for these examples.
- Speak with landowners during the ‘on the ground’ analysis to obtain a damage report.
- TFS to create a year-round plan of preventative fire measures, distribute to all landowners, councils, volunteers and communicate TFS planned actions for the year toward fire prevention.
- TFS to conduct negotiation meetings with conservationists/relevant government departments to educate and formalise a plan of fire prevention strategies for World Heritage areas.
- Re-instate community volunteer groups to previous levels and equip them with resources to fight future fires in consultation with TFS.
- Community consultation nights to educate and obtain feedback and local knowledge for future bushfire strategies.
- Training for TFS staff to fight bushfires.
- Investigate what other Fire Services nationally have procedurally in place for bushfires and ‘cherry pick’ elements of what works well and adapt to the Tasmanian fire plan.
- Longer timelines for grant deadlines and one on one assistance with applications for farmers who are identified as needing extra assistance such as no access to internet facilities along with diminished capabilities such as sight and mobility challenges.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide an example of our member’s feedback about the recent 2018/19 Tasmanian Bushfires. We look forward to hearing the conclusions of this review and in conjunction with our members, a further future opportunity to assist in implementing positive change and outcomes.

Please contact the TFGA if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Skillern

Chief Executive Officer

10th May 2019