# MT BOLD CASE STUDY

**Helen Goodman**
**Kaye Stevens**
**Catherine Rowe**

Report for the Country Fire Service Community Education Unit

Bushfire CRC/RMIT University

**Executive Summary** ..... **6**
**Key Findings and Observations** ..... **7**
**Findings** ..... **7**
**Observations** ..... **9**
**Part One: Purpose, Approach and Results Overview** ..... **10**
**1.1: Introduction** ..... **10**
**1.2: Purpose of the Mt Bold Interview Study** ..... **11**
**1.3: The Mt Bold Area and the Fire Event** ..... **12**
**Mt Bold Area** ..... **12**
**Mt Bold Fire** ..... **13**
**1.4:Methodology** ..... **15**
**Interview Schedule** ..... **15**
**Identifying household descriptors for selection** ..... **16**
**1.5: Findings and Observations** ..... **19**
**Household Characteristics** ..... **19**
Differences in selection criteria and interviewees circumstances ..... 19
Descriptive characteristics of interviewees ..... 20
**Research Question responses** ..... **22**
A: Anticipation of, and preparation for a fire pre-event ..... 23
B: Influence of experience of fire event ..... 25
C: Household Priorities ..... 26
D: Perceptions and expectations of the CFS ..... 27
E: Influence of Informal ‘community/brigade’ contact on community fire awareness ..... 27
F: Community Connectedness ..... 29
G: Policies and Programs ..... 30
**Summary of Findings and Observations** ..... **33**
Summary of Findings ..... 33
Summary of Observations ..... 38
**1.6: Discussion_ At the watershed between ‘community’ and ‘agency’ fields of practice** ..... **39**
**Introduction** ..... **39**
**Interconnections at the Agency/Community field.** ..... **42**
**Centrality of Volunteer/Brigade presence** ..... **44**
**Recognising untapped potential** ..... **44**
Programs as a bridge ..... 44
Involving others in assisting with community awareness raising ..... 46
The volunteer domain ..... 47
Community roles at the community level ..... 47
**Ideas to guide thinking and discussion** ..... **48**
Subsidiarity ..... 48
Cooperation and interdependency between domains ..... 49
The agency in the community ..... 50
The household in the community ..... 50
Resources ..... 51

Residents' trust in the CFS ..... 51
Supporting the capacity to 'imagine' ..... 52
The 'Them and Us' dichotomy ..... 53
Managing the Split Resources argument..... 53
Functional redundancy in information delivery ..... 54
**Summary of 1.6 Discussion .....55**
**Part Two: Results in Detail .....58**
**2.1: Decision making in relation to the threat of fire.....58**
**Pre fire event thoughts and decisions.....58**
Actual responses during the event: those who had planned to stay. 58
Actual responses during the event: those who had planned to leave.59
House Preparation..... 59
**2.2: CFS Education and awareness programs .....59**
**Introduction .....59**
**Community Education: Agency account of activities .....60**
**Community Meetings: Researchers' account of community interest63**
A: Interested in meetings ..... 64
B: Not interested in meetings..... 64
C: Conditionally interested..... 64
**Community Fire Safe group meetings .....65**
Summary: Community Fire Safe Group Meetings ..... 67
**Community Education Meetings: Preparedness Meetings .....68**
Summary: Preparedness Meetings ..... 70
**Community Briefings during or soon after the fire .....70**
Summary: Community Briefings during or soon after the fire ..... 76
**Pre – event Media campaigns and publicity materials awareness76**
Introduction ..... 76
Specific CFS initiatives ..... 77
Barriers to Dissemination of publicity materials ..... 80
Summary: Media Campaigns and publicity materials (pre event) .... 81
**Bushfire Information and Warning Messages: during an event. ..81**
Radio ..... 81
Websites ..... 83
CFS hotline ..... 83
Other formal warning methods ..... 84
Summary: Bushfire Information and Warning Messages (during an event) 85
**Household, Neighbourhood and Community/Agency level influences 85**
Context: Community Infrastructure ..... 85
Context: Passage of the fire ..... 86
Summary: Community Infrastructure and the passage of fire ..... 88
**2.3 Levels of Response: Influences .....88**
**Individual Household Level .....89**
Beliefs, attitudes ..... 89
Summary: beliefs attitudes and circumstances ..... 90

Life stages and life choices..... 91
Summary: Life stages and life choices ..... 92
**Emotional response .....92**
Self reports of 'panic' or 'calm' or 'panic and calm' during the fire event 92
Summary: Self reports of panic or calm or panic and calm ..... 94
Emotional Responses post fire ..... 95
Summary: Ongoing emotional impacts..... 97
**The "Act" of Taking Action.....97**
Summary: The act of taking action ..... 98
**Local and or specialised knowledge .....99**
Summary: Local and or specialised Knowledge ..... 100
Community members capacity to recognise risk ..... 100
Summary: Community members capacity to recognise risk..... 101
**Intra-household communication: Relationships and Technology101**
Intra-family relationships..... 101
Technology ..... 101
Summary: Communication: relationships and technology..... 101
Influence of the presence of children..... 102
Summary: Influence of the presence of children ..... 106
The influence of animals on decision making ..... 106
Summary: Influence of animals on decision making..... 110
**Community level relationships: the presence, the potential and the barriers. .....111**
Planning with Neighbours (prior to the fire) ..... 111
Summary: Planning with neighbours (prior to the fire)..... 113
Contact with significant others during the fire event ..... 113
Summary: Contact with significant others during the fire event..... 116
Fire as a trigger to create community connections: post fire experiences 116
Interviewees differing experiences of 'community' ..... 117
Summary: Fire triggering community connections and interviewees experience of community..... 119
Influence of informal contact with the Brigade ..... 119
**2.4 Agency Level experiences .....120**
**Informal contact between community members and with members of the fire service - pre fire.....120**
Summary: association between informal contact with the fire service and community fire response – pre fire. ..... 121
Building processes and the CFS ..... 121
Expectations of CFS assistance during a fire event ..... 122
Summary: Expectations of CFS assistance during a fire event..... 124
**Impressions of the CFS response to the Mt Bold fire.....124**
Observations of the overall response effort..... 124
Summary: Observations of the overall response effort..... 126
Direct CFS Assistance at the household level..... 126
Summary: Direct Intervention of the CFS ..... 128

Praise for and defence of the CFS ..... 128
Summary: Praise and Defence..... 129
Criticism of the CFS..... 130
Summary: Criticism..... 131
Outside brigades lack of local knowledge..... 131
Summary: Lack of Local Knowledge ..... 131
CFS dedication after the fire ..... 132
Summary: Dedication after the fire ..... 132
Community members experience of offering help or considering helping the CFS..... 132
Summary: Community experience of offering help or considering help. 134
**Strengths and concerns regarding CFS as a 'community institution'. 134**
Summary: Strengths and concerns regarding CFS as a community institution..... 137
**Agency Environments external to CFS .....137**
Summary: Agency environments external to CFS..... 138
**Appendix 1: Strahan Survey questions guiding sample selection140**
**References .....141**

# Executive Summary

The federally funded Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre combines the efforts of more than 30 research, fire, and land management agencies in undertaking research on social, economic, and environmental aspects of bushfire.

Mt Bold in South Australia was the site of a substantial bushfire in January 2007 which had a 'good' outcome in terms of few injuries and small property loss. The Mt Bold Case Study was carried out within the program entitled "Community Self-Sufficiency for Fire Safety" and its task was to 'try and determine how the various education and awareness approaches conducted may have been of benefit to this community prior to and during the fire'. The study entailed interviews with all available members of 18 resident households.

**Key findings include:**

- Residents found that valuable information was provided by a range of CFS programs, although – as expected - the efficacy of programs varied widely.
- Prior to the fire, of the 18 households two thirds had planned to stay and defend although some (3 households) decisions were conditional.
- Of the 3 conditional defenders, all had had fire experience, and two said that they would stay unless it was a 'firestorm'. These were the only interviewees to use the term 'firestorm'.
- About half the households had a positive orientation to attending meetings in relation to fire awareness and had done so.
- Incorporating a community component or focus in information, as distinct from a specifically household focus, increased the penetration of the message in most households.
- Residents who attended a briefing meeting appreciated the chance to mix with other community members during a time of crisis

While the project was not expected to make recommendations, the researchers felt it appropriate to make some observations based on their experience in the project.

**Key observations include:**

- It is important to continue to encourage greater communication between, and cooperation with neighbours.
- It is appropriate to identify brigade members and agency staff who have enhanced capacity for community engagement and to encourage and support them in a greater role in the community.
- The role of the community as a whole, as distinct from the aggregation of households, should be recognised, examined, and further developed.
- Fire experience removes or reduces many conventional social barriers in community life. Accordingly opportunities should be explored to find community leadership in new places and people.
- There is a potential dilemma between encouraging individualistic self sufficiency and encouraging neighbourly and community cooperation. While no easy solution presents itself, the issue should be recognised and considered.
- A rapidly changing demographic seems to be a fairly constant feature of fire-prone areas. While this adds to the complexity of the task, the usual receptiveness of new members to existing community norms also

provides opportunities to consolidate fire awareness as a community value.

- Where they exist, locally produced informal newsletters have been an important source of information. A very small expenditure might often be all that is required to support the extension of a local newsletter.
- Incorporating a community component or focus in information, as distinct from a specifically household focus, increased the penetration of the message in most households.
- Repetition of information, in time, in different locations and in different contexts, is important in both penetration and recall of the message.

# Key Findings and Observations

## Findings

- Prior to the fire, of the 18 households two thirds had planned to stay and defend although some (3 households) decisions were conditional.
- The remaining one third comprised 2 who planned to leave and 4 whose planning was either inconclusive or not apparent.
- Of the 3 conditional defenders, all had had fire experience, and two said that they would stay unless it was a ‘firestorm’. These were the only interviewees to use the term ‘firestorm’.
- Residents found that valuable information was provided by:
    - Informal contact with brigade members socially, as neighbours, and through local businesses.
    - Structured events such as a CFS training exercises doing burnoffs on a non-CFS properties
    - Telephone contact from the CFS updating brigade records
    - Community meetings in which well prepared households shared their knowledge and experience with others
- There is an increasing expectation that residents engage in appropriate preparedness activities.
- Only a few residents had experienced the CFS Community Education program called “Community Fire Safe”.
- The residents who had experienced “Community Fire Safe” found the program useful for:
    - Accessing new information
    - Providing the opportunity to discuss this in a group setting with neighbours
    - Providing the chance to learn more about neighbours circumstances
    - Taking a ‘hands on’ approach with particular aspects of an actual home
    - Raising issues to do with planning with immediate household members
    - Prompting residents to seek out additional information from other sources
    - Prompting residents to attend other community information events run by the CFS
- About half the households had a positive orientation to attending meetings in relation to fire awareness and had done so.

- Almost all households had seen advertisements and had read some publications
- About a quarter of households were aware of the CFS website before the event
- Only a few residents had heard of or used the Hotline.
- The opportunity for community members to provide feedback to the CFS at briefing meetings was valued as was the willingness of CFS to hear criticism.
- More than half the households attended a briefing meeting and appreciated the access to information that the meeting provided
- Residents who attended a briefing meeting appreciated the chance to mix with other community members during a time of crisis
- Those residents who mentioned the Sticker Campaign were either directly critical, regarding it as not useful, or were unsure of the purpose of the sticker
- Some residents expressed an interest in an increase in information and awareness through:
    - A continuation of the Community Fire Safe group program
    - An increase in the frequency of other preparedness meetings
    - A continuation of ‘briefing meetings’
- Of the residents who wanted future meetings, some wanted meetings which facilitated social contact, and others wanted less emphasis on community interaction and more on discrete ‘information’ topics

## Observations

- It is important to continue to encourage greater communication between, and cooperation with neighbours.
- It is appropriate to identify brigade members and agency staff who have enhanced capacity for community engagement and to encourage and support them in a greater role in the community.
- The similarities and differences among community members, brigade staff, and community education staff should be identified and further examined with a view to seeking additional opportunities for collaboration.
- The role of the community as a whole, as distinct from the aggregation of households, should be recognised, examined, and further developed.
- Fire experience removes or reduces many conventional social barriers in community life. Accordingly opportunities should be explored to find community leadership in new places and people.
- Fire experience commonly results in community members displaying a greatly increased flexibility in their assumed role within the community and latent and unexpected altruism is often displayed. This complex mechanism should be further examined.
- There is a potential dilemma between encouraging individualistic self sufficiency and encouraging neighbourly and community cooperation. While no easy solution presents itself, the issue should be recognised and considered.
- A rapidly changing demographic seems to be a fairly constant feature of fire-prone areas. While this adds to the complexity of the task, the usual receptiveness of new members to existing community norms also provides opportunities to consolidate fire awareness as a community value.
- The importance of regularly operating community locations, such as a General Store, in information dissemination needs to be recognised and reinforced.
- Where they exist, locally produced informal newsletters have been an important source of information. A very small expenditure might often be all that is required to support the extension of a local newsletter.
- Incorporating a community component or focus in information, as distinct from a specifically household focus, increases the penetration of the message in most households.
- Repetition of information, in time, in different locations and in different contexts, is important in both penetration and recall of the message.
- The public should be made more aware of potentially severe limitations on public warning systems in certain fire events. This should be associated with an increased focus on the importance of community level social networks.

# Part One: Purpose, Approach and Results Overview

## 1.1: Introduction

The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), funded through the Australian Government's CRC program, commenced in 2003 and combines the efforts of more than 30 research, fire and land management agencies in Australia and New Zealand in undertaking research on bushfires. In its seven year life span it aims to better understand the complex social, economic and environmental aspects of bushfires.

The research program has more than 50 projects covering:
- Safe Prevention, Preparation and Suppression
- Management of Fire in the Landscape
- Community Self-Sufficiency for Fire Safety
- Protection of People and Property

It is also providing an education program that is helping to develop the next generation of fire researchers and helps to inform the public and special interest groups on the latest developments in bushfire knowledge.

Project C7, the "Evaluation Framework" project, forms part of the program called "Community Self Sufficiency for Fire Safety". Members of this project have been examining the influences of formal programs and activities on increasing community safety, identifying influences of context on both programs and informal approaches to organizing, and examining mechanisms which operate to engage and disengage key stakeholders in the domain of community safety.

One key piece of work carried out by the Project has been a review of inquiries into impacts of bushfire and natural hazards (Elsworth et al, 2009). This work resulted in a policy theory model of what was seen in these inquiries to constitute a 'community safety' approach to bushfire in Australia. Six foundational values were identified. A key foundational value was that of 'shared responsibility'. This is understood to refer to "the need for responsibility [for community safety outcomes] to be shared between individuals, fire and other agencies, and governments". (Elsworth et al, 2009, p.9).

In other work carried out by the group, in particular the concept mapping work (see Elsworth, et al, 2008) one of the desired outcomes for community safety, was seen to be "greater community ownership and responsibility for bushfire safety". The concept mapping statements in this cluster were seen to be about "community members taking increased responsibility for their own safety, planning for themselves, and the communities that they belong to" (p.146). These ideas have emerged from both Inquiries and also consultation with members of fire services and members of communities who have typically been active in fire prevention. Members of the Evaluation Framework project have undertaken case studies in order to illuminate how these values and concepts are understood at the local level. The Mt Bold study is one such case study.

The closest body of theory and practice which has 'community ownership' as a goal, is community development. Community development is also a term used in Community Safety sections or Divisions in most of the fire and emergency services. We need therefore to understand how concepts of 'community development' are practiced in the field of community awareness activities in

relation to the threat of fire, and also whether this orientation to community safety is of merit. If it is, our task is to understand how it works, how fire services contribute to the idea, and what roles community members play to move toward 'community ownership'.

In 2007, the then Manager of Community Education in the Country Fire Service, South Australia, sought to capitalise on the fact that there had been a fire in the Mt Bold area in the Mt Lofty Ranges, which provided an opportunity in an interface area, to inquire into how residents actually responded to the fire, particularly in relation to whether any links could be made between the programs they may have accessed, and their fire response. Project C7 researchers had done some work on the Lower Eyre Peninsula (LEP) following the Wangary fire, but there had been a minimal Community Education presence there as the Lower Eyre was not targeted as an area of extreme high fire danger (Goodman et al, 2007). Interestingly, we were advised that Mt Bold itself was not an area nominated by the District Bushfire Prevention Committee for high priority targeting with Community Education resources.

Simply put, the Country Fire Service Community Education Unit Manager sought our assistance to 'try and determine how the various education and awareness approaches conducted may have been of benefit to this community prior to and during the fire" (email 18/1/2007).

## 1.2: Purpose of the Mt Bold Interview Study

Discussions between CFS Community Education Unit staff and C7 researchers led to an understanding that the purpose of this interview study is to ascertain the influence of a multi intervention approach of community awareness activities which included meetings, events, activities, media and information and warning systems.

The Community Education Unit carries out some formal evaluation efforts of its programs. Among these have included collecting feedback both pre and post Community Fire Safe group meetings, door knock and a follow up survey of residents in Bridgewater, and a survey of residents in Marble Hill. The Mt Bold study provided an opportunity to examine a range of interventions in a particular area, in a more in-depth interview by researchers outside the organization.

The aim of the study initially was to examine the influence of the range of community education and awareness activities on:

- Residents preparation of their properties for the threat of bushfire, and their capacity to develop, practice, and, in a fire event, implement an appropriate action plan
- Whether and how strategies used in CFS awareness activities assisted residents to be self reliant
- Residents ability to take up and integrate warning messages delivered during a fire event
- Whether those who had been involved in the Community Fire Safe Group program were better prepared
- Where community awareness activities were not undertaken by residents, what informed their decision making in the event of the fire

- Whether the newly implemented 'briefing meetings' during and shortly after a fire event were seen as beneficial by residents and if so, in what ways
- Ways in which the fire event influenced residents thinking and possible future response

Additional conversations between C7 and Community Education (CE) identified other concerns and the purpose of the project broadened to incorporate the following aspects:

- How emotional attachment to animals and children impacted on decision making. Due to the changing demographic of traditional farming to hobby farmers, it was suggested that some people may present a strong attachment to their animals which may influence their response to fire.
- In what ways did community member's contact with CFS volunteers influence their preparedness and response?
- Whether friends, neighbours and other community contacts and networks influenced residents planning and action
- The strengths and limitations of different approaches to community education and engagement

# 1.3: The Mt Bold Area and the Fire Event

## Mt Bold Area

Mt Bold is located approximately 30 minutes South East of Adelaide. Mt Bold encompasses three local governments: the City of Onkaparinga, the District Council of Mt Barker and Alexandrina Council. Interviews for this study took place within the areas surrounding the townships of Kangarilla and McLaren Vale (City of Onkapringa) Meadows and Echunga (District Council of Mt Barker), with the predominant number coming from the Kangarilla area.

The City of Onkaparinga website provided access to community profile data from the 2006 census. However it is not possible, for the purposes of this report, to set out ABS data from the more localised area of Kangarilla where the majority of our interviewees resided. The closest unit of data presentation we could establish from the City of Onkaparinga website was the grouping called "McLaren Flat, Blewitt Springs, Kangarilla and Kuitpo".

The following paragraph below is taken directly from the City of Onkaparinga website.

> The area is predominantly a rural area with several small townships. Parts of the localities of Kangarilla and Kuitpo are located in the District Council of Mt Barker and the Alexandrina Council area. Settlement of the area dates from the 1940's with land used mainly for timber cutting and farming. Population has increased slightly since the 1990s as a result of new dwellings being added to the area. Rural land continues to be used mainly for grazing, farming and vineyards. Land area within this district is 10,453 hectares with a

> density of 0.20 people per hectare. (2006) ABS data[1]

The District Council of Mt Barker website also provided access to census community profile data. Within this data we were able to identify census boundaries that are classified as Southern Rural. This area exceeds the smaller geographical area, in which interviewees resided.

The District Council of Mt Barker website describes the "Southern Rural Shire" area as follows:

> The area is classified as The Southern Rural area of the District Council of Mt Barker. This includes the rural areas of Meadows. The area is classified by rural residential living and farming. Over the last 10 years the enumerated population has increased by 10.1% or 202 people in southern rural from 2,001 in 1996 to 2,203 in 2006. The land area is approximately 20,637 hectares and the density is 0.11 people per hectare in 2006[2].

In addition to the above community profile notes obtained from census data, we were able to build our own picture of demographic trends from conversations with interviewees. Some described the area as having a strong past in dairying, with now some areas developed into smaller properties, with an increase in the number of wine producers, hobby farmers, residents with horses and a growing trend as a 'bedroom community' with people making lifestyle choices to live rurally and work in City areas.

Large tracts of Kangarilla and Echunga are still farming and grazing land surrounded by dense native scrub and the Kuitpo Forest. The Mt Bold Reservoir is the largest water supply in South Australia, and supplies water for Adelaide. Some properties are difficult to access due to hills and gullies, and many roads are windy dirt roads, with some being 'no through roads'. The surrounding areas are suburban blocks scattered amongst trees, bushes and natural vegetation.

### Fire History

We were advised that Mt Bold area had remained relatively free from major fires for many years. According to several interviewees Ash Wednesday (1983) affected some areas of the Mt Bold region. Others reported that several grass and scrub fires had occurred in some areas in more recent times. Interviewees made specific reference to a fire that occurred at Onkaparinga Gorge a few weeks prior to the Mt Bold fires. We were unable to determine the intensity and severity of this fire. However the 2007 Mt Bold fires were the first to threaten bushland that had not been burnt for 30 years or more.

## Mt Bold Fire

A media release was posted on the CFS website on Tuesday the 9th January 2007 at 4:15pm, declaring it a total fire ban day for 13 of the 15 fire

---

[1] Text for this paragraph taken from *http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=119&pg=101&gid=220&type=enum*

[2] Text for this paragraph taken from *http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=141&pg=101&gid=190&type=enum*

ban districts. On Wednesday the 10th January at approximately 6:30pm the CFS received reports of a fire that was believed to have been intentionally lit, burning in scrub next to the Mt Bold Road. The fire rapidly spread into Kuitpo Forest and threatened property on Dashwood Gully, Saddlebags, Razorback and Boot Hill Roads. A southerly wind change at approximately 9:30pm pushed the fire toward Echunga. Many residents reported that this wind change is what saved their home and property. The fire conditions were considered extreme; temperatures reached 40 degrees with gusty Northerly winds. As described in an SES newsletter:

> The first briefing described a very serious situation with the fire impacting an area that had not been burnt for 30 years, had very difficult access, and was burning in pine plantation, scrub and farm areas with isolated homes at risk. With dusk approaching there was little opportunity to utilise aerial attack techniques. The CFS were deployed to asset protection only.

The fire was attended by approximately 400 fire fighters from SA Country Fire Service, Metropolitan Fire Service, Forestry SA and SA Department for Environment and Heritage with more than 80 appliances. Other resources utilised included SA Police, State Emergency Services, SA Water, Salvation Army Emergency Services and SA Ambulance.

Several media releases were posted on the CFS website providing information, warnings and updates on the fire. The first release was posted at 6:50pm 10th January advising that 25 volunteer fire fighters were attending the fire and aerial water bombing aircraft were en route. The release made reference to the approaching dusk, difficulty with aerial attack, and to asset protection only.[3] At 5:50 pm on the 11th January the CFS posted a media release that confirmed that the fire was contained and threat to the public was reduced. The fire was still burning within control lines. Over the 23 hour period the CFS posted a total of 28 media releases advising the public of fire updates and progression. [4]

The Mt Bold fire mainly affected areas in Kangarilla and Echunga, burning a total of 1795 hectares with a perimeter of 31 kilometres. Official reports indicate that only one residence was lost[5]. However, the fire threatened up to 60 homes and destroyed several sheds, vehicles, stock, fencing and a historic unoccupied building known as Yaroona. As the fire was in close proximity of the Mt Bold Reservoir, there was particular concern at the time for the water quality issues which may be impacted by the fire and its treatment. Interviewees reported losses of possession and property, including stock, fences, sheds and personal items and the impact these losses have had on them since the fire. Some loss of quality of life was reported, in terms of increased anxiety and other markers of loss of everyday enjoyment

---

[3] http://www.ses.sa.gov.au/newmedia/incidents/mt-bold-fires-2007.asp

[4] http://www.cfs.org.au/

[5] It was noted during the Mt Bold Field Trip on 4th September 2008, following the AFAC conference, that the residence had been a community hall and had been converted to a home. It was reported that it was not known that this was now a residence.

# 1.4:Methodology

This qualitative research study followed a telephone survey of residents of two areas of South Australia, Mt Bold and Humbug Scrub, which had been carried out by Strahan and Associates. One of the approaches of Project C7 is to engage in mixed method research. Gerald Elsworth provided some assistance to John Gawen, Manager of Community Education at the CFS, and Ken Strahan, to design the telephone survey.[6]

The CFS requested an in-depth case study approach involving interviews with a selected sample of residents in the fire affected region of Mt Bold. It was felt that this approach maximised the likelihood of highlighting and analysing the multiple influences on residents' bushfire awareness, preparation, and response.

## Interview Schedule

The interviews were semi structured and a schedule was developed pertaining to cover the following aspects;

- Household characteristics including:
  - length of residence in the area
  - usual household occupants
  - presence of children and animals,
  - neighbourhood 'fire' communication
  - affiliations with the fire service
- Information about fire preparedness received or sought before the fire (media, meetings etc)
- Planning and preparation before the fire threat including:
  - level of risk awareness
  - discussion of plan within household and with neighbours
  - formation of intent re stay or go
- Finding out about the fire, initial responses to the threat, means of keeping informed
- Reflections on actions and responses
- Meetings attended during or after fire (what type, what was helpful, not helpful)
- Expectations and experience of fire service (contact with the CFS, changed expectations)

[6] Opportunities exist for ongoing work on a comparison between the Mt Bold and Humbug Scrub telephone survey (the results of which remain with the CE Unit of the CFS) and the results of this study. This work lies outside the capability of Project C7 as at May 2009, but could be picked up by others in the future as an exercise in multi method evaluation approaches.

The above questions resulted in identifying categories that would be used to nominate a selection of households to be approached for follow up face to face interviewees.

## Identifying household descriptors for selection

We selected households that participated in the Strahan survey using selection criteria, derived from the following questions:

- Whether the resident thought their home was threatened by the fire
- Whether they lived in a residential house block, a hobby farm or small acreage, a house on a large farm, or other
- If they had received information abut bushfire safety in the previous 12 months, where they had received this from?
- Whether the resident or household member, had attended one of a list of meeting types (Community Fire Safe, Bushfire Blitz etc)
- Whether the resident or household member had seen or heard any advertisements or received any booklets

The full text of the questions used in the Strahan survey from which the sample was drawn is set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

Table 1 below sets out the numbers of households which were sought in each category, and the numbers actually achieved.

**Table 1 Category selection and numbers of interviewees sought and achieved**

| Category | Category Descriptors | Agreed to interview | Interviewed |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Threatened<br>Small Land Holder<br>Media = Yes<br>Meetings = No | 4 | 4 of 4 |
| 2 | Threatened<br>Small Land Holder<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meetings= No<br>Community Hall Meeting = Yes | 1 | 1 of 1 |
| 3 | Threatened<br>Small Land Holder<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meetings = Yes<br>Community Hall Meeting = Yes | 5 | 4 of 5 |
| 4 | Threatened<br>Farmer<br>Media = Yes<br>Meeting = No | 3 | 2 of 3 |
| 5 | Threatened<br>Farmer<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meetings = No<br>Community Hall meeting = Yes | 2 | 2 of 2 |
| 6 | Threatened<br>Farmer<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meeting = Yes<br>Community Hall Meeting = Possibly | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | Not Threatened<br>Small Land Holder<br>Media = Yes<br>Meetings = No | 2 | 2 of 2 |
| 8 | Not Threatened<br>Small Land Holder<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meetings = Yes<br>Community Hall Meeting = No | 1 | 1 of 1 |
| 9 | Not Threatened | 2 | 2 of 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Small Land Holder<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meeting = Yes<br>Community Hall Meeting = Yes | | |
| 10 | Not Threatened<br>Farmer<br>Media = Yes<br>Fire Safe Meetings = Possibly<br>Community Hall Meetings = Possibly | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 20 | 18 of 20 Interviewed |

Most people were willing to be involved with follow up interviews, but due to prior and personal engagements, two of twenty were unable to commit to a proposed interview time during the time that we were visiting the area. In addition, the numbers in some categories were very small, reducing the likelihood of obtaining full numbers from these categories.

Eighteen interviews, ranging from 45 to 90 minutes, with either individuals or families, were conducted by a team of three interviewers during a four day period in November 2007. All of the interviews were held at interviewees' homes except for one which was held in the interviewee's workplace. The interviews were semi-structured, with a set of initial questions and issues for discussion, which were necessarily modified to be relevant to the different circumstances and experiences of interviewees. The interviewers encouraged interviewees to add additional information providing an opportunity to gather unanticipated responses. During the process of conducting the interviews new issues emerged and were inquired about in subsequent interviews.

**Factors impinging on findings**

The interviewers were sensitive to the possibility of arousing emotional reactions as people recounted what for some may have been a distressing experience. In a few cases it was inappropriate to follow the planned interview schedule. It was also 11 months between the fire event and interviews which affected some recall of activity and responses. Technical difficulties were experienced in taping during two interviews and some of the data that emerged in conversations before and after interviews was not recorded. These issues caused some gaps in our accounts. Mental fatigue and at times the time limitations of interviewees also impacted on researchers' ability to insure a full coverage of all questions and follow up of some of the views expressed. The overall impact of these factors probably led to an underreporting of key issues, rather than a misrepresentation of the issues.

Although the selection process sought to obtain a sample of people who had attended different types of meetings there were discrepancies between the telephone survey results and face to face interviews in terms of exposure to different types of CFS community education programs. As a consequence the capacity to gather data on some program types was limited.

In section 1.5 below (Household Characteristics) we report the similarities and differences between the Strahan survey responses and the meanings we elicited at face to face interview.

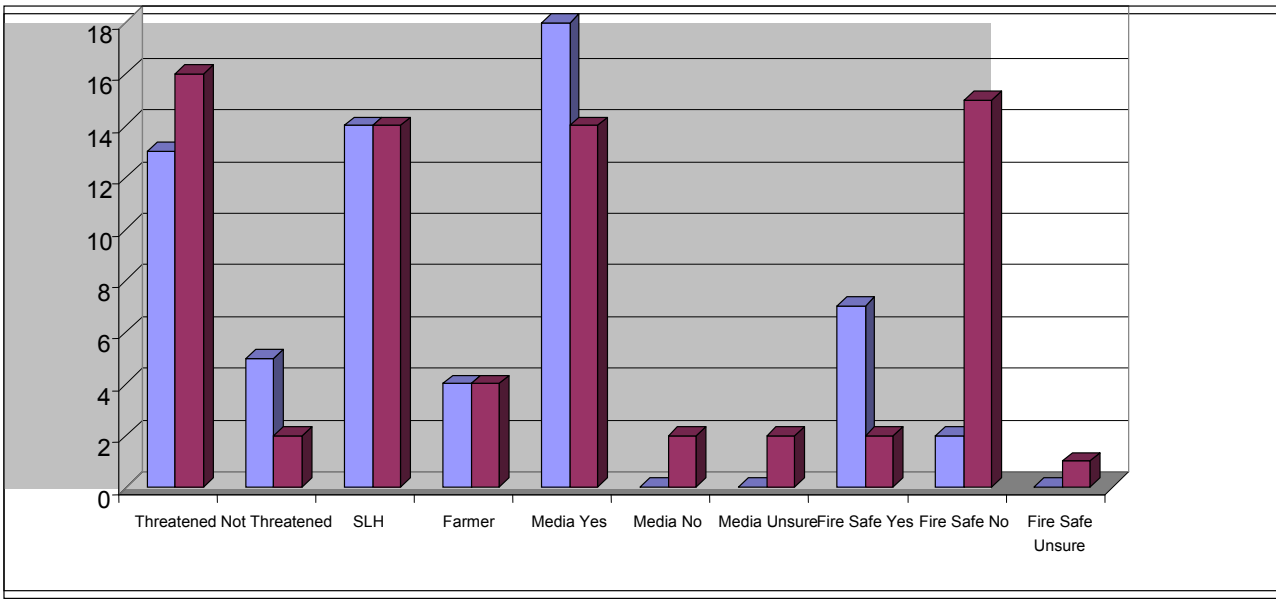
# 1.5: Findings and Observations

## Household Characteristics

### Differences in selection criteria and interviewees circumstances

The selection categories provided a basis to identify potential households that would meet the requirements of the Community Education Unit for further interviews. Some disparities between the selection categories based on telephone interview responses and the interviewees' responses in face to face interviews have been identified. Table 2 below points to these disparities.

**Table 2 Survey and Interview Data findings on selected characteristics**




One key disparity concerns the definition of the different meetings held in the area. We believe only one of those disparities had a major effect on the research goals, and that was the question of whether the interviewee had been to a Community Fire Safe group meeting. According to the telephone interview data (Strahan survey) 7 households who agreed to face to face interviews had attended a Community Fire Safe meeting within the 12 months prior to the survey. However, during the face to face interviews, we learnt that only 2 had attended a Community Fire Safe meeting, and that this meeting had occurred outside the 12 month period stipulated in the (Strahan) survey question.

Other disparities included those who recorded as being threatened by the Mt Bold fire. The survey suggested that 13 households stated they were threatened, with five households not threatened. At interview 16 households reported that they felt threatened by the fire, and only two indicated they did not

feel threatened. Being 'threatened' is a very subjective notion, and without some agreement as to what was being asked, variation in the survey response and the interpretations which have been made during the interview study are to be expected.

There were several disparities in relation to being 'aware of media'. Initial selection criteria did not include those who were unaware of media and publications. However our interviews suggest that at least two households had not received information on bushfire safety and preparation from the CFS. In two households we were unable to ascertain if any media was recalled.

We could not include other selection criteria named as "meetings" and "community hall meetings" in the comparison between selection criteria and our assessment of these facts. This was because we could not establish the meaning of "meeting" and "community hall meeting" in the survey data, and hence could not distinguish them. In response to questions at interview about meetings attended, residents mainly spoke of preparation meetings and briefing meetings during the fire, but it became apparent that what constituted a meeting, and the distinction between types of meetings, was not clearly established in the telephone survey.

## Descriptive characteristics of interviewees

Descriptive characteristics of interviewees and their households are presented in the following table.

Table 3 Descriptors of Interviewees

| No. Present | Family members | Age Range | Length of time lived in area | Type of Property | Meetings attended Prior to Mt Bold Fire | Meetings attended during or after Mt Bold Fire | Level of Preparedness prior to Mt Bold fire |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Couple | 70+ | 30 – 39 yrs | Small Land Holding | No | No | Standard |
| 2 | Couple Adult child | 40 - 49 | 20 – 29 yrs Less than 5 years at current address | Farm | No | Yes | Minimal |
| 1 | Couple | 60-69 | 5 - 10 years | Farm | No | Yes | Comprehensive |
| 2 | Couple | 50 – 59 | 15 - 19 | Small Land Holding | No | Yes | Standard |
| 3 | Couple Adult Children | 40-49 20 - 29 | Less than 5 years | Small Land Holding | No | No | Standard |
| 1 | Single Person | 50-59 | 15 – 19 years | Small Land Holder | Yes | Yes | Comprehensive |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Single Person | 60 - 69 | 40 – 49 years | Small Land Holder | No | No | Comprehensive |
| 2 | Couple Children | 40 - 49 | 5 – 10 years | Small Land Holder | No | No | Standard |
| 3 | Couple adult child elderly parent | 40 – 49<br>20 - 29 | Not specified | Small Land Holder | Yes | Yes | Comprehensive |
| 2 | Couple | 40 - 49 | 15 - 19 years | Small Land Holder | No | No | Comprehensive |
| 2 | Couple Adult child | 60 – 69 | 60 + | Farm | No | Yes | Comprehensive |
| 1 | Couple | 60 – 69 | 20 – 29 years | Small Land Holder | Yes | No | Minimal |
| 2 | Couple | 60 – 69 | 20 – 29 years | Small Land Holder | Yes | Yes | Comprehensive |
| 1 | Couple child | 40 - 49 | 5 – 10 years | Small Land Holder | Yes | Yes | Minimal |
| 1 | Couple Children | 30 - 39 | 15 – 19 years | Small Land Holder | Not Discussed | Not Discussed | Minimal |
| 2 | Couple children | 30 - 39 | 5 – 10 years | Small Land Holder | Yes | Yes | Comprehensive |
| 1 | Couple | 60-69 | 15 – 19 years | Farm | No | Yes | Comprehensive |
| 3 | Older Person couple children | 30 – 39<br>60 – 69 | 30 – 39 years | Farm | No | No | Standard |

Thirty three people from 18 households participated in the interviews. There are 5 household types, with 16 households identifying as a couple and 2 households were single people living alone. Of these 16 couples, 7 households had no children living at home, 4 households had adult children living at home, with 1 of these households also having an elderly dependant person in their care. The remaining 5 households had young children living at home. Of the 18 interviews, 13 households identified as small land holders, while 5 households identified as farmers.

We interviewed people of various ages ranging from 20 to over 70. We did not request specific ages of interviewees and from our assessment we estimate that of the 33 people interviewed, 2 people were between the ages of 20 – 29, 5 people were aged 30 – 39 , 11 people were between 40 – 49 , 3 were

between 50 – 59, 9 interviewees were between 60 – 69 and 2 people were over 70.

In all but one case we were able to establish the length of time people had lived within the area. One household had only recently moved to the locality, and had been living at their current address for less than one year. Four households had resided in the area from 5 – 10 years and 5 families had been in the region for 15 – 19 years. Three families had lived in the area for 20 – 29 years, 2 households had lived in the area for 30 – 39 years, 1 had lived in the area for 40 – 49 years and the final household had lived in the area for more than 60 years.

We attempted to establish what meetings interviewees had attended both prior to, during and immediately after the Mt Bold fire. We were able to establish that 6 households had attended a bushfire safety and preparedness meeting prior to the Mt Bold fire, indicating that 11 households had not attended a bushfire safety and preparedness meeting prior to the Mt Bold fire. In one interview this was not recorded and we have noted this issue in this interview as 'not discussed.' We were able to establish that 10 households had attended a meeting after the Mt Bold fire, indicating that 7 households had not attending a meeting after the Mt Bold fire.

The 'level of preparedness' in the last column of the Table 3 above is an assessment we made and should be taken to be indicative only. One family for example who presented as comprehensively prepared, appeared not to have had a plan for an elderly relative who was dependent on someone being home to guide her to safety. We did not interview households with the intention of making preparedness assessments and therefore these assessments have arisen based on information sourced from the interviews.

We deemed those with minimal level preparedness as those where household members appeared not to have taken preparation steps such having appropriate fire fighting equipment, nor to have discussed a reasonable plan with family members and who seemed unaware of the fire risk within the area, prior to the fire event.

A standard level of preparedness was thought of as being demonstrated by those interviewees who appeared to have taken adequate fire preparation steps, including having discussed a plan with family members, having fire fighting equipment installed and available, and being aware of their environment and understanding that they do live in a fire prone area.

A comprehensive level of preparedness was seen as those interviewees who demonstrated a high level of fire knowledge, had taken extensive preparation steps to ensure their homes were well equipped to defend against a fire and had also developed written plans in discussion with family members.

From these descriptions of the levels of preparedness, we assessed the 18 households and established that 4 households demonstrated a minimal level of preparedness, 5 households demonstrated a standard level of preparedness and 9 households demonstrated a comprehensive level of preparedness.

## Research Question responses

The research set out to examine 7 key areas:

A. capacity of households to anticipate fire pre event

B. the influence of experience of the fire event

C. household priorities

D. perceptions of the CFS

E. informal contact between the brigade and other community members

F. community connectedness

G. policies and programs.

Findings of most importance in relation to these seven questions are presented in the following seven sections. While a key research focus was formal awareness activities, we record the findings in relation to the formal awareness activities last (section G below). Setting these formal activities last allows us to weave the findings from previous sections, which all have implications for programs into the final findings section on CFS policies and programs.

Given the focus in the research on both the CFS programs and activities, and community response only a small number of agencies external to the CFS that played a role in community awareness were mentioned by interviewees. We provide these findings here, so as to move straight into our set of more substantial findings. We finish part one of this report with section 1.7 entitled Discussion. Part Two of the report provides more research detail from which the findings in Part One were drawn.

Briefly, in relation to agencies external to the fire service, community members would like to see more informed 'buy in' to fire awareness issues from other organizations, such as the media, insurance companies, and primary and secondary schools. Inadequate insurance cover was highlighted, as were its flow on effects, such as difficulty replacing fencing, leading to decreased stock, thereby increasing fire risk. Some residents believed that insurance policies should take into consideration the level of planning and preparedness that households have undertaken in a high bush fire risk area, and that this preparation should be reflected in premiums. Responsibility of other agencies such as land management agencies and Local Government agencies, were also raised by interviewees. How these responsibilities are understood and enacted in a local area is a topic for further discussion and possible research.

### A note on presentation

For the most part we have divided these sections into two categories: what we found from the interviews (Findings) and remarks that we see as relevant in addition to the relevance of the findings (Observations). We have not made observations in relation to all categories. In a few cases the observation arose as an immediate consequence of a particular finding, such that to separate the two would lose the context. In these cases, the finding and the observation appear together.

## A: Anticipation of, and preparation for a fire pre-event

By 'house' preparation we mean 'whole of property' preparation, with a focus on the more tangible aspects of preparation, including vegetation, building preparation, power and water supplies, etc. By 'household' preparation we mean preparation of all members of the household, including thinking through

the needs of all members, including small children, pets, other dependents, animals and valuables[7].

## Findings

### Anticipation

Prior to the fire, of the 18 households two thirds had planned to stay and defend although some (3 households) decisions were conditional.

The remaining one third comprised 2 who planned to leave and 4 whose planning was inconclusive or non-existent.

Of the 3 conditional defenders, all had had fire experience, and two said that they would stay unless it was a 'firestorm'. These were the only interviewees to use the term 'firestorm'.

### Preparation

There were varying degrees of pre-event preparation among the 18 households. Two broad household types stood out as demonstrating the greatest capacity to anticipate the possibility of a fire event. We have called these the 'off-property business group' and the 'farmer group'. These descriptors are crude, and also not mutually exclusive, and are therefore indicative only. For a few of these households, farming was a second occupation, after another life in business enterprises.

#### Off-property business group.

Residents in this category generally had one or more members engaged in full-time work away from the property, although the group includes two households that displayed similar characteristics, in which there were recently retired residents.

The households in this category appeared to derive particular technical knowledge from their occupations. This comprised either particular experience with buildings, machines, and landscape management, or, as household partnerships, mutual recognition for each member's capacities and 'domains of organizing', evidenced by an ability to plan and work together in overlapping as well as discrete roles. These households had engaged in extensive 'house' and 'household' preparation. They had made use of information materials and Community Education programs, one quite extensively, as well as having sought to improve their response capacity through other 'non formal' forms of information and interaction, such as conversations with those with local and specialist knowledge.

#### Farming Households

The second group appeared to us to be differently prepared from the group above. They were less 'text book' prepared than the 'off-property business group' households. In the main they expected that they were likely to encounter fire in their lifetime, and held corresponding knowledge, skills, resources, and an expectation that they would stay and defend the property. Members in this group were also less inclined to seek 'formally presented' knowledge available through programs and activities.

#### Others

[7] This distinction was suggested by Catherine Rowe, Research Assistant, Project C7, when we were working together on analyzing data from the Women's Skills Survey (Delaine et al, 2008).

For several of the 18 households the sources of influence on what factors alerted them to the presence of risk, and their response to this awareness, other than formal programs, are various, sketchy, and sometimes appear as 'accidental'. An example of seemingly sporadic influences on one particular household's growing awareness of the threat of fire and their subsequent responses to that threat, highlights our finding that sources of influence are commonly diverse. These sources, sometimes contemporaneous, have their roots in experience, relationships, 'learning by doing and seeing', skills, agency resources such as an educational presence and or resources, and an openness to the environment. The household chosen as an exemplar of apparently sporadic influences, was new the area and had no previous fire experience; factors which influenced household members' awareness and preparedness included:

- a 'handover' from the previous property owner which included raising awareness of fire and the resources which were available at the property to assist with fire response
- a small fire shortly after their arrival
- being contacted by the brigade to update brigade records and learning more about local activities in this conversation
- having a CFS fuel reduction training session held at their property which highlighted particular issues they needed to address which they subsequently did.
- having neighbours who were CFS members
- using the internet to follow up on web based educative materials which had been brought to their attention.

**Observations**

Not all extended family members in these households held this experience or expectation equally. Accordingly it is important for individuals in households to feel they can speak up when they are less confident than other members of their households about their fire abilities, and agencies need to avoid the presumption that one household member's perspective could be generalised to all household members.

There is room for more coordination of apparently 'accidental' occurrences, though we recognise that this would take resources, and a commitment to explore the possibilities of coordination, with the various parties. This is explored further in the Discussion.

## B: Influence of experience of fire event

**Findings**

After the fire event interviewees reported a heightened awareness of both the technical and 'human relationship' aspects of fire planning and response.

Technical aspects of fire planning and response capacity.

The fire experience highlighted questions about the types of defence equipment one might purchase, the most desirable fire proofing specifications for hoses, water tanks, sprinklers, whether to leave gates open or closed, the actual risk posed by certain vegetation types, building requirements or modifications, the safest place to shelter within the house, clothing, keeping a

cleared area around the house, (eg no wood pile), knowing how to prepare the house when a fire is approaching, eg remove curtains, take the doormat in etc.

'Human relationship' aspects of fire planning and response.

These learning's related particularly to social and emotional issues, and included increased insights gained from the responses of all household members, the need for increased knowledge of neighbours' situations, including their capacities and needs. Interviewees voiced particular concerns about the emotional needs of young adults, suggesting this is a particular issue requiring more attention at a community level. There was increased awareness of the effort required within households to create a coherent shared household plan and that this process requires constant modification. Some interviewees reflected explicitly about how the fire experience increased their capacity to think about the event as it might have been experienced by others.

## C: Household Priorities

### Findings

The fire event prompted residents to think more specifically about their priorities in terms of decision making in relation to bushfire. Several people identified children and animals as two of the most important influences on their decision making. Some people wanted children to be away from the physical threat of fire, and others, some who chose to stay, still wanted children to be protected from the anxiety of fire. Some women in particular were conflicted in their decision making about which family member's needs took priority when faced with the fire event, such as the internal conflict of wanting to leave with one family member (eg a child) and not wanting to be separated from a partner who wished to stay and defend.

Interviewees reported a range of response to animals, including how they prioritised their safety and wellbeing, including moving stock, bringing animals inside, delaying leaving because they were trying to ensure the safety of animals, and checking on their own and neighbours stock. For those who intended to leave, getting pets into vehicles featured in their accounts.

Some interviewees post fire showed an interest in increasing their awareness of their own household members' and neighbours' anxieties and capacities, including their vulnerabilities, resources and plans. For some, material possessions such as houses were regarded as replaceable.

Some interviewees offered assistance to others in ways which demonstrated an altruism which they may not have anticipated prior to being faced with the threat of fire.. For some interviewees receiving help from others (particularly in carrying out roles one usually carries out for oneself) was experienced as a welcome relief and also as stressful (sometimes these responses were experienced by the same person at the same time, and sometimes by different interviewees).

### Observations

The inability to anticipate altruistic responses emphasises the importance of talking with neighbours about fire plans. This also highlights an important human capacity to engage in mutually reciprocal behaviour.

There are human limits to the extent to which we can know what our priorities are, or might be, just as there are limits to the degree to which the details of a fire event can be planned for. The extent of variation posed by the circumstances of the event itself, includes factors such as who is present, who

and what is likely to be impacted, differing priorities of household members, as well as the fire behaviour, including point of fire commencement, and both predicted and actual weather. Efforts must continue to be made, however, to intervene across three levels of organization on which community safety policy and practice operate - households, communities, and involved agencies, so that contingencies can be examined and similarities and differences identified across these three levels.

## D: Perceptions and expectations of the CFS

### Findings

Overall, interviewees reported being reassured that the CFS response was quick and coordinated. Factors highlighted were the speed with which the CFS responded, and the number and expert handling of local and out of area 'on the ground' and aerial appliances. The length of time over which the assistance was given was also highlighted, including both during the fire and in follow up operations over some days. Advice offered by brigade members to other community members during the fire was appreciated. People found the presence of brigade members to be supportive, even if fleeting.

There is a lot of loyalty and affirmation expressed toward the role of the fire service volunteer, and a sense by some that there is not enough done to bring this more to the eye of the public. Some interviewees rose to the defence of the CFS volunteers when these volunteers were criticized by other local people, finding these criticisms unreasonable. Where interviewees themselves voiced criticisms of the CFS, they emphasised this was aimed mainly at the 'organizational' level, rather than at the volunteer level.

A small but significant number suggested that the CFS was moving too far away from its 'community' roots – that it was no longer a 'community agency' but had become a 'government agency'. Some of the factors seen to be pulling the organization in this direction included the threat of litigation, the increase in training requirements for volunteers, and also requirements for statewide or interstate responses during large fires.

Most people expected the CFS to prioritise those at greatest risk during a fire and don't expect that a fire truck will be able to attend each threatened property if there is a large fire. They understood the need for volunteers to ensure their own safety and that while the CFS will assist them if possible, people have to help themselves by reducing fire risks on their properties. A small number of people expected that the CFS would advise them if they had to evacuate.

## E: Influence of Informal 'community/brigade' contact on community fire awareness

### Findings

Several interviewees sought advice from CFS volunteers on how to be better prepared for bushfires both before and after the fire. Community members cited contact with a Brigade Captain as an important source of information. Elements of this trust seemed to arise from the captain's well established community relationships, fire service experience, and his business which provided the means through which community members accessed him, his knowledge and his mechanical skills. These information seeking interactions between community members and volunteer brigade members demonstrate the demand for community education and awareness activities.

Interviewees' contact with brigade members socially, as neighbours, and through local businesses, provides opportunities for raising questions and discussing concerns about fire safety. More structured events such as a CFS training exercise doing a burnoff on non CFS properties is educative and valued, and residents would like to see this extended. Other opportunities for CFS community interaction and community awareness raising, include when CFS carry out activities such as phoning community members in order to update their brigade records, have training days which involve community members, and carry out property inspections required for building approvals.

At least one household which was well prepared was recognised as such by a local brigade and the members of the household have been invited to share some of that knowledge with others in community based meetings. This provides one exemplar of, or one variant of 'shared responsibility' between fire agencies and communities for bushfire safety.

This above example provides one instance of a creative brigade response to the capacity of a community member to help in the education of other community members. Another interesting example of accessing learning was highlighted by a volunteer who attended a 'Community Fire Safe' meeting. He described how much he had learnt from a 'Community Education' presenter. This suggests that from a community perspective, the advice from a brigade member and from a Community Education officer can be complementary but not identical.

Some community members were not open to ideas of connecting informally with the CFS, either with the volunteer members, or any service they may offer. This points to the ongoing need for a range of ways and means through which community members both access information and interact with others while increasing their capacity to respond to the threat of fire. Community members also need to be provided with opportunities through which they can make a contribution.

Members of the community received advice, support and encouragement from brigade members during the fire event, particularly where community members were able to play a complementary (or more easily identifiable) role, such as extinguishing fire. Where community members offered to assist the fire services during the event, these offers could not be accommodated. One community member took her offer into her own hands and assisted others remove animals from their properties, an outcome that may not be deemed desirable by a fire service.

One possible barrier identified by interviewees was whether issues of 'liability' prevent volunteer and staff fire service members from offering certain forms of advice, and or whether worries about litigation affected community members engaging with the fire services and or other community members in shared tasks of fire response.

**Observations**

Further opportunities exist for brigade members and agency staff to increase their awareness of those community members who have particular capacities in the field of increasing community awareness. What is done with this latent community capacity requires more thought and discussion at all levels from the community level through to agency and state level.

The points of similarity, difference and opportunities for more collaboration between community members, brigade members and community education staff needs further explication and management.

There is a need for the fire service and community members to explore opportunities for the community to assist with the fire response, and in doing so to identify any barriers which might unnecessarily restrict, hamper or discourage community involvement in response efforts. There is a further need to explore the links between how community assist each other and fire services in the response efforts with how these links may also contribute ultimately to preparedness efforts.

## F: Community Connectedness

### Findings

Many householders under threat demonstrated a resourcefulness and a capacity to be self managing in the absence of reliable information, particularly in the early stages of the fire event. Some householders used a range of measures to obtain information and to inform others about the fire which assisted in their ability to respond to the threat. Several of these measures included helping each other in addition to providing warnings.

The fire event increased people's awareness of the importance of community networks in general. Particular reference was also made to the need to know each other's contact numbers and property identification numbers (called RAPID numbers in South Australia).

The possible role for community leadership is also exemplified in the findings that there is an increasing community expectation in some households that all households engage in some preparedness activities, so they can maximise offers of assistance that may come their way in a fire event. Two households interviewed might make their future offers of assistance to others conditional on those others having engaged in some preparedness activity.

Demographic changes in the area were experienced by longer term residents as both losses (e.g. decrease in farming viability and hence farming communities) and gains (more diverse and interesting community mix). Some newer arrivals enjoyed the increased amenity offered by rural life, as well as becoming increasingly aware of the demands of rural living, including the responsibility for fire preparedness. Data in this study provided examples of demographic changes which impacted in ways which both strengthened and weakened aspects of community connectedness.

### Observations

Fire experience triggers in many an openness to and willingness to cross or challenge the commonly experienced barriers to more cohesive communities, whether these barriers are structural (employment status and conditions), attitudinal (attributions from one group to another), emotional, or the myriad of other barriers reducing people's capacities to care for themselves, or each other, at the household, neighbourhood, community, agency, government and societal level. There are opportunities for leadership at a community level, but a meeting space and some 'structure' may be needed to bring these opportunities to light, and support their ongoing development.

While the research reported on those who are disinclined to mix at the local level, these 'wishes' may be less rigid than they seem on first presentation. Research results pointed to the presence of good will, even if latent in

seemingly 'fixed' to a range of issues related to community safety. This latent good will, community members to each other and to the fire service, has the potential to be further built on. This orientation requires both resources and a community development approach in both policy and practice. For many community members, individual responses to fire awareness and response are closely tied to or influenced by responses of others with whom they relate. For some there is a sense of community responsibility for others in an emergency, which influences their decision making.

A small number of households demonstrated a particularly strong sense of self sufficiency. On one reading, this is a desired outcome of the current policy direction. There is a risk here however if policies and messages fuse the notion of self sufficiency with individuality, or an 'individualised response' only. Such a fusion, if it were to be the dominant message, could contribute to a more insular and less community oriented mindset. [An extreme version of this human potential can be seen in gated communities].

Some households who were more singularly focussed, reported some understandable frustration at the propensity of neighbours who did not know what to do, to distract them from preparing or fire fighting. There are opportunities for those with greater knowledge and skills if they are willing and supported, to provide leadership to those who may seek their company in a fire event. While leadership can come from any household, it would be important to understand who could be seen as leaders at this level, and on what issues.

While there were several examples of assistance and help coming from non farmers, one interviewee emphasised the constant presence in the district of her farmer neighbour (the man who was reported as 'watching over things'), his general willingness to assist them as 'non farmers', and also for his actual support on the day of the fire when she was unable to get back to her home. These findings point to the need to explore how community networks in general can be strengthened, a strengthening which clearly has a potential to increase community safety, due to what many interviewees experienced as the highly interdependent nature of community relationships in a crisis.

Community infrastructure provides an important means of facilitating community interaction. One example is the General Store/Post Office, both as a place where information could be posted, and circulated, and where people may congregate and talk. Another example of community infrastructure is the community person who, with assistance, convenes a Community Forum and also compiles and circulates a Community Newsletter. The General Store/Post Office manager has reduced the hours of opening which interviewees reported as having a negative impact on the social and information disseminating possibilities available through this venue.

Research results highlight individual household responses which were and can be further enhanced by the strength of connections with others in the community. This suggests that those messages which focus on social contexts as well as on individual households will gain the public recognition that many do think and act 'socially', and this can be built on at the level of fire awareness messages. Those programs which encourage these social connections in both the fire service and community domains, are particularly important.

## G: Policies and Programs

### Findings

Education programs and other initiatives pre event

Only a few residents had experienced the CFS Community Education program called “Community Fire Safe”. The example of Community Fire Safe as a program identified in this research was that of an early and interrupted program. Some interviewees had heard of the program through local sources, including a Brigade Captain and via a local Community Newsletter (the Kangarilla Voice). When the idea was broadly outlined by researchers to those who did not know of the program, residents showed interest. Community members were unclear about names of community education officers, and whether any were still assigned to this district.

The interviewees who had experienced the program “Community Fire Safe” found the program useful. Usefulness cited included for accessing new information, for having the opportunity to discuss this in a group setting with neighbours, for the chance to learn more about neighbours circumstances, for taking a ‘hands on’ approach with particular aspects of an actual home, and for issues to do with planning with immediate household members. The program served as a trigger to seek out additional information from other sources and to attend other community information events run by the CFS. We note that being able to ask specific questions and to learn from the experiences of others can also be part of other preparedness meetings, such as Bushfire Blitz, a one off ‘street meeting’ type of program.

Eight households had a positive orientation to attending meetings in relation to fire awareness and had done so. Fifteen had seen advertisements and had read publications, 4 were aware of the CFS website pre event. Only a few interviewees had heard of or used the Hotline.

Five households indicated that they would not be interested in awareness and education meetings, and 4 would be interested if certain conditions were met. For some residents, a negative past experience of ‘community meetings’ (not necessarily in relation to bushfire safety issues) influenced their attitude to future community meetings and functions.

Initiatives at the time of a fire

Briefing meetings that provided the opportunity for community members to provide feedback to the CFS were valued, and community members also valued the willingness of CFS to hear criticism. Ten out of 18 attended a briefing meeting, and 13 people had heard the ABC broadcast of the fire on the day

More than half the interviewees did not find the ABC broadcasting in relation to the fire helpful, particularly due to the gap in time between the details of the fire progression, and the broadcast.

Although it had only just been introduced, the small number of residents who had considered the Sticker Campaign (where a sticker is placed by the resident on their property when they have become ‘fire ready’) were either directly critical, regarding it as not useful, or were unsure of the purpose the sticker was supposed to serve.

Briefing meetings served a number of functions, with key ones being an opportunity for residents to access information, the opportunity for residents to mix together at a time of crisis, and an opportunity for community members to give feedback to the fire service. Interviewees showed a positive response to the willingness of the CFS to hear criticism, and there are potential flow on effects of this observation, in that it could act to reduce what one person

described as an ‘us and them’ situation, with the ‘them’ being, among other things, the holders of information, and those the one’s ‘in charge’.

Particular community safety messages were seen as needing particular and repeated emphasis. One message is that households should prepare themselves to be independent in their fire response and decision making, including not just the decision as to whether they should stay or go, but also *when* they should go. Three households still expected they would receive advice on when they should leave. Interviewees recognised the emotional difficulty faced by brigade members when having to tell community members that they may not receive assistance from the fire service; interviewees also recognised that it was also difficult for some community members to ”hear” this message.

Some residents who were regarded as not having a plan, were those who thought planning was more something you did ‘in the event’, when the circumstances you were confronting were clearer. The full time farmers spoke less of a structured plan, such as might be the product of the ‘pencil and paper’ campaign. The households with farming experience felt confident in their ability to defend themselves and their properties and would not be interested in meetings, although not all members of the household held the same degree of confidence.

Some interviewees expressed an interest in an increase in information and awareness sessions. This expressed interest ranged from a continuation of the Community Fire Safe group program, an increase in the frequency of other preparedness meetings, and a continuation of ‘briefing meetings’. Some interviewees who showed an interest in future meetings, qualified their views about meetings, with two broad types emerging: those who were more interested in a learning environment which facilitated social contact, and those who wanted less emphasis on community interaction and more on a discrete ‘information’ topic. Several interviewees could see value in targeting meetings to trigger interest shown by community members in specialised topics, such as mechanical issues (such as pumps, sprinklers etc), and horses and Landcare.

Some saw both policy neglect and policy conflict as impacting on community safety. Policy neglect was perceived as operating when Local Government failed to police the building regulation requirements regarding safe siting and building of houses or showed no interest in the clearing of roadside vegetation. Policy conflict was noted between ‘green’ policies of reducing power consumption with use of natural vegetation, such as shade from trees, and ‘bushfire policies’ of careful removal of foliage near buildings. Policy conflict also entailed regulations regarding allowed ratio of horses to hectares. This ratio was seen as unnecessarily restrictive and worked against being able to stock more horses per acre, so as to adequately reduce fuel loads. The practices of different land management agencies were also sometimes perceived as being in conflict with reducing fire risks. For example, the decision to stop grazing in water catchment areas was seen to result in higher levels of vegetation and hence higher fire risk. A policy area where there was confusion in the public’s mind had to do with community members still expecting advice about evacuation centres.

**Observations**

Repetition of fire awareness information messages is important and helpful. It acted as a prompt, even to interviewees with the most knowledge. It was also helpful to have repeated messages about the same programs coming from

different sources, such as Head Office, Community Education Unit, Local Brigades, local press, local government, and local newsletters. Having information from several sources increased the likelihood of capturing and focusing people's attention.

There is a need for the public to understand that in some instances, there will be severe limitations on public warning systems. This also points again to the importance of informal systems of warning such as were in evidence in the research, due to the operation of community level social networks (as discussed in Goodman et al, 2007).

The uncertainty surrounding the human ability to control a fire, including the point of its ignition, and the rate of its spread, highlights the fact that fire planning has inherent elements to it which are uncontrollable. The most prepared household in our sample, were also the closest to the point of origin of the fire. These factors alone highlight the need for planning to be 'multi staged'. At the household level it is appropriate to have a plan for action if the fire is five minutes away, another if the fire is an hour away, and another where likely impact is a number of hours or days away.

## Summary of Findings and Observations

### Summary of Findings

- Prior to the fire, of the 18 households two thirds had planned to stay and defend although some (3 households) of these decisions were conditional.
- The remaining one third comprised 2 who planned to leave and 4 whose planning was inconclusive or non-existent.
- Of the 3 conditional defenders, all had had fire experience, and two said that they would stay unless it was a 'firestorm'. These were the only interviewees to use the term 'firestorm'.
- Within a small sample cultural patterns emerged. The "farmer group" and the "off-property business group" shared some similar and some different properties, and together demonstrated greater engagement with fire preparation.
- Characteristics of the "off-property business group" households included:
    - Significant relevant expertise derived from off-property work place experience.
    - Extensive and effective preparation involving all members of the household.
- Characteristics of the "farming" households included:
    - Less formal preparation with reliance on extensive knowledge and experience of the area and fire in general attained over a long period
    - Knowledge and familiarity with relevant equipment
    - An assumption, often with little discussion, that they would defend

  - The incorporation of preparedness for fire into their lives rather than it being related to an impending event

- Several households reported a wide range of factors, some not anticipated, that led to greater awareness and knowledge.
- In addition to the obvious increase in knowledge that came from having experienced an actual fire, households generally reported – in relation both to their own members and to neighbours - a range of social and emotional issues brought to light by the fire.
- Households generally reported an increased recognition of the need for plans to be flexible and under more or less constant review.
- Several residents struggled with the allocation of priorities among spouses, children, animals and property.
- Some female residents had great difficulty in reconciling the physical and emotional safety of children with their desire to assist their partners in defending the property.
- Management of stock was a major and complex component in the activities of farmers, while safety of pets was a common concern in almost all households.
- The fire prompted some residents to reorient their priorities towards greater recognition of household members' and neighbours' vulnerabilities and capacities to the extent of regarding assets, including their houses, as replaceable.
- Some residents displayed altruism which was a surprise on both sides; while unexpected assistance was generally welcomed it also caused stress, often simultaneously.
- Overall residents were reassured by the quick and coordinated response of the CFS. Factors specifically prompting reassurance include:
  - The number of local and out of the area ground appliances
  - The expert handling of ground appliances
  - The duration of the assistance
  - The extent and duration of follow up operations
  - The availability of expert advice to residents
- Many residents displayed significant loyalty to the CFS and felt that efforts to focus public attention on its role were often inadequate.
- In the few cases where it occurred the focus of criticism was the organisational level of the CFS rather than volunteers
- A small but significant number thought that the CFS was losing its community focus and becoming a 'government agency'.
- Factors seen to be deflecting the CFS from a stronger community focus were:
  - The threat of litigation
  - The increase in training requirements for volunteers

  - Requirements for statewide or interstate responses during large fires.

- Most residents recognised the need for the CFS to prioritise its response to fires.
- The need for the CFS to ensure the safety of volunteers when responding to a fire was widely understood.
- Very few regarded the CFS as having the sole responsibility for the safety of residents and their property, but a small number expected that the CFS would advise them if they had to evacuate.
- The CFS was cited as a valuable source of advice both during and after the fire.
- Several residents specifically mentioned a Brigade Captain who was trusted and whose standing was augmented by his respected, non-fire related role within the community.
- Residents found that valuable information was provided by:
  - Informal contact with brigade members socially, as neighbours, and through local businesses.
  - Structured events such as a CFS training exercises doing burnoffs on a non-CFS properties
  - Telephone contact from the CFS updating brigade records
  - Community meetings in which well prepared households shared their knowledge and experience with others
- While a distinction emerged between the advice from a brigade member and the information provided by a Community Education Officer, these two were seen as complimentary rather than superfluous or in conflict.
- Some residents were resistant to informal contact with the CFS.
- The CFS was sometimes unable to accommodate offers of assistance from non-CFS community members prompting one community member to take a questionable initiative.
- Residents identified the issue of legal liability as a barrier to advice and shared activities.
- Many residents displayed resourcefulness and self management in the absence of reliable information, particularly in the early stages of the fire.
- The fire increased awareness of the importance of community networks. Particular mention was also made of the need to know others' contact numbers and property identification numbers (called RAPID numbers in South Australia).
- There is an increasing expectation that residents engage in appropriate preparedness activities. Two households indicated that future offers of assistance to neighbours would be conditional on these neighbours having appropriately prepared for fire.
- Demographic changes in the area were experienced by longer term residents as both losses and gains.

- Data in this study provided examples of demographic changes which impacted in ways which both strengthened and weakened community connectedness.
- Only a few residents had experienced the CFS Community Education program called “Community Fire Safe”.
- The residents who had experienced “Community Fire Safe” found the program useful for:
    - Accessing new information
    - Providing the opportunity to discuss this in a group setting with neighbours
    - Providing the chance to learn more about neighbours circumstances
    - Taking a ‘hands on’ approach with particular aspects of an actual home
    - Raising issues to do with planning with immediate household members
    - Prompting residents to seek out additional information from other sources
    - Prompting residents to attend other community information events run by the CFS
- About half the households had a positive orientation to attending meetings in relation to fire awareness and had done so.
- Almost all households had seen advertisements and had read publications
- About a quarter of households were aware of the CFS website before the event
- Only a few residents had heard of or used the Hotline.
- About a third of households indicated that they would not be interested in awareness and education meetings unless certain conditions were met.
- In some cases the attitude to community meetings and functions was influenced by negative past experience of non-fire related meetings functions.
- The opportunity for community members to provide feedback to the CFS at briefing meetings was valued as was the willingness of CFS to hear criticism.
- More than half the households attended a briefing meeting and appreciated the access to information that the meeting provided
- Residents who attended a briefing meeting appreciated the chance to mix with other community members during a time of crisis
- About two thirds had heard the ABC broadcast of the fire on the day
- More than half the residents did not find the ABC helpful, due largely to the gap in time between the fire progression, and the broadcast.

- Those residents who were aware of the Sticker Campaign were either directly critical, regarding it as not useful, or were unsure of the purpose of the sticker
- In all the information and advice, residents identified three messages as needing greater emphasis. These were:
    - That households should prepare themselves to be independent in their fire response
    - That households should prepare themselves to decide independently not just whether to stay or go, but also when, how and where they should go
    - That households would not be told by the CFS when they should leave
- Residents recognised the emotional difficulty faced by brigade members when having to tell community members that they that they may not receive assistance
- Residents also recognised that it was also difficult for some community members to hear this message.
- Some residents thought planning was something to be done 'in the event', when the circumstances confronted were clearer
- The full-time farmers made less use of structured plans, felt confident in their ability to defend, and would not be interested in meetings
- Some residents expressed an interest in an increase in information and awareness through:
    - A continuation of the Community Fire Safe group program
    - An increase in the frequency of other preparedness meetings
    - A continuation of 'briefing meetings'
- The residents who wanted future meetings fell into two groups, those wanting meetings which facilitated social contact, and those who wanted less emphasis on community interaction and more on discrete 'information' topics
- Several residents saw value in meetings around specialised topics to trigger community interest.
- Perceptions of policy neglect and/or conflict on the part of arms of government were raised by a number of residents.
- Perceptions of policy neglect impacting negatively on community safety relating to Local Government included:
    - Failure to police building regulations regarding safe siting of houses
    - Failure to police building regulations regarding safety of buildings
    - Failure to clear roadside vegetation

- Policy conflict seen as impacting negatively on community safety included:
    - The adoption of ‘green’ policies of reducing power consumption with use of natural vegetation, in particular shade trees near houses
    - The requirements of stocking ratio regulations which reduced the capacity of horses to adequately reduce fuel loads.
    - The decision to stop grazing in water catchment areas resulting in higher levels of vegetation.
- Residents were confused about the policy in relation to evacuation centres.

## Summary of Observations

- All members of a particular household should not be seen as having a single approach to the issue of bushfire, and it is appropriate to encourage a maximum degree of frank discussion within households.
- An open examination of the factors that people found useful might well lead to an extension of the list of identified components of sound preparation for a fire event.
- It is important to continue to encourage greater communication between, and cooperation with neighbours. This is a signature strength of the Community Fire Safe group idea.
- Households should be encouraged to explore a range of contingencies in bushfire preparation and agencies should specifically assist them in this process.
- It is appropriate to identify brigade members and agency staff who have enhanced capacity for community engagement and to encourage and support them in a greater role in the community.
- The similarities and differences among community members, brigade staff, and community education staff should be identified and further examined with a view to seeking additional opportunities for collaboration.
- The role of the community as a whole, as distinct from the aggregation of households, should be recognised, examined, and further developed.
- Fire experience removes or reduces many conventional social barriers in community life. Accordingly opportunities should be explored to find community leadership in new places and people.
- Fire experience commonly results in community members displaying a greatly increased flexibility in their assumed role within the community and latent and unexpected altruism is often displayed. This complex mechanism should be further examined.
- There is a potential dilemma between encouraging self sufficiency and encouraging neighbourly and community cooperation. While no easy solution presents itself, the issue should be recognised and considered.

- The frustration expressed by some well prepared householders to the poor preparation of some of their neighbours may provide, ironically, an opportunity to foster leadership at a neighbourhood level. Some community based structure would be required for this to work.
- A rapidly changing demographic seems to be a fairly constant feature of fire-prone areas. While this adds to the complexity of the task, the usual receptiveness of new members to existing community norms also provides opportunities to consolidate fire awareness as a community value.
- The importance of regularly operating community locations, such as a General Store, in information dissemination needs to be recognised and reinforced.
- Where they exist, locally produced informal newsletters have been an important source of information. A very small expenditure might often be all that is required to support the extension of a local newsletter.
- Incorporating a community component or focus in information, as distinct from a specifically household focus, increases the penetration of the message in most households.
- Repetition of information, in time, in different locations and in different contexts, is important in both penetration and recall of the message.
- The public should be made more aware of potentially severe limitations on public warning systems in certain fire events. This should be associated with an increased focus on the importance of community level social networks.
- Fire preparedness at a household level should include a plan of action if the fire is five minutes away, another if the fire is an hour away, and another where likely impact is a number of hours or days away.

# 1.6: Discussion_ At the watershed between ‘community’ and ‘agency’ fields of practice

## Introduction

Figure 4 below conveys two key ‘spatial’ ideas, the ’domain’ and ‘field’. A domain is, broadly, an area of influence, and a field can be regarded as a component of a domain. For our purposes here, the broad three domains framing our discussion are:

1: Fire Service Agency

In this domain are located the Brigades in their formal roles as constituted under legislation, the structures they work in as Local, Group and Regional entities. Here also are the Regional and Head Office structures, as well as the formal education, awareness and engagement activities.

2: Community

The community domain is inhabited by households who are variously prepared for the threat of fire. This domain also includes the social relationships with neighbours that influenced their preparedness, response and recovery.

3: Other institutional Structures

We include here other institutional structures, such as Local Government, Land and Water management agencies, business structures such as employing bodies, and other formal sources of influence such as schools.

We also draw reference to four fields, where the fields broadly represent areas of overlap of the domains. In this Discussion section we refer to the first three of these four fields in this section: ‘agency/community’, ‘community infrastructure, and ‘volunteer’.

1: Agency/community field. This field is where members of the community interact with the fire service, which can occur through formal education programs, community briefings. Where operational volunteers assist those processes, such as by being guest speakers, or running programs themselves, they would be represented in this domain.

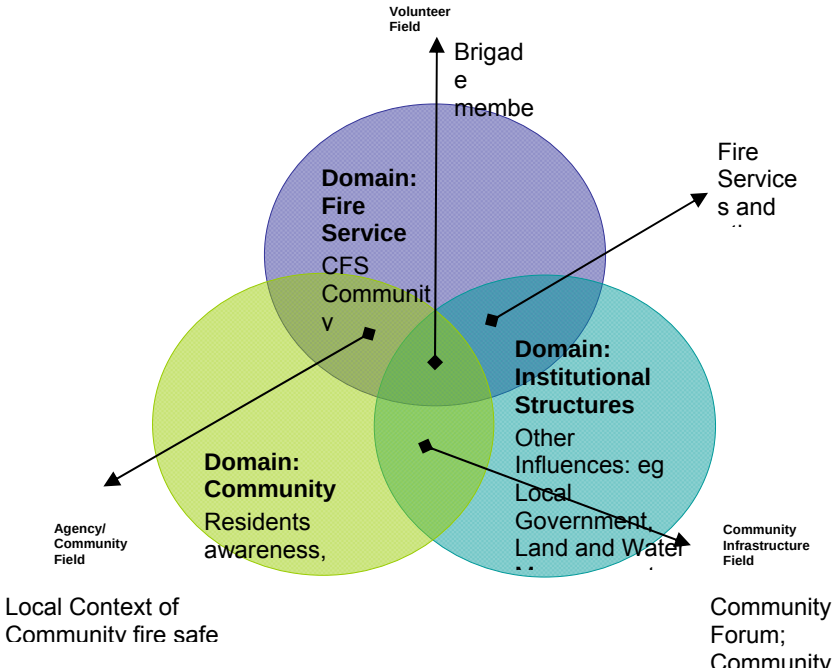
2: Community infrastructure field. Here we have placed the somewhat more ‘formal’ structures and processes which exist at a community level, but which may be shaped in institutional structures such as business. An example in this field is the Post Office/General Store. Structures and processes in this field may also be shaped by voluntary community activities such as a local newsletter for residents, run by a local community group.

3: Volunteer field, comprising an overlap of Fire Service, Community and Other Institutional domains. We have located this field in a distinct and central space in this map of overlapping areas. It is occupied by those who inhabit the ‘community domain’, particularly when these volunteers go about their ‘ordinary’ life as community residents. These same residents also fall into the ‘agency’ domain in their formal operational roles when engaged in training for and responding to fire events. They often also form part of the other institutional structures domain, as often they are also either in employment, and hence part of other large ‘systems’ while also being ‘volunteers’ in the fire service system.

We make distinctions between the volunteer operational role and ‘community contact’ role. While these distinctions are in some ways somewhat arbitrary, they are worth making. because the functions which are or can be performed when wearing an ‘operational response’ hat, are in the main different from those which can be performed when wearing the ‘community member’ hat. We understand that the operational roles can also include roles focussed more on other aspects of brigade life, including education, awareness and engagement activities. We only caught a glimpse of this in this study, and need to understand more about the capacity of brigades for these wider roles, in order to support some of the tentative conclusions we will draw in this final chapter. This understanding will not be gained by us at least, in the course of the life of Bushfire CRC Project C7.

4: Fire service/other institutions: The activities in this field, such as structures which exist between the fire service and local government, do not form part of this research, although they are clearly of critical importance from a community safety perspective, and they are demanding of fire service and local government time and resources.

**Figure 1. Overlapping domains of influences on bushfire safety**




The research highlights what is already understood in many areas, even if it is difficult to capture in the more abstract theoretical models of response, that the challenges faced by people in responding to a fire event are immensely complex and include:

- past experience
- emotional responsiveness, of self and others
- role responsibilities, particularly for dependants, including children, other vulnerable people, and animals
- nature and type of community and other social network connections, between households themselves, and at the agency and community level
- the nature of the property and its preparedness
- resource capacity, both technical resources and human relationships

- the assessment of fire intensity, wind direction, and other immediate environmental characteristics.
- available time
- A myriad of contingencies such as who is home at the time, and who is on nearby properties
- Degree of knowledge and planning by all members of the household, including whether EAE activities had been found and taken up

The inability to control for most of these factors throws a particular sort of pressure on last minute decision making. The fact that these matters cannot be addressed in publications or other 'static' means of preparing for fire, adds weight to the importance of more 'interactive' community awareness activities. Here individuals and households can increase their awareness, in an environment which maximises the chance of their individual and 'collective' minds allowing the entry of new or threatening information or ideas.

That the process of increasing one's critical awareness is, at least for many, incremental, suggests the need for both a dynamic and multilayered approach to community awareness and engagement: an approach offering a diversity in range of activities, in content, and in location of presentation. We saw a dynamic and multilayered approach used by some members of the community to increasing their critical awareness. We argue that there is a need more formally to recognise, across the organizational divisions, the *connections* between the formal and informal organizational influences on community safety. These connections need to be teased out, appreciated, and where necessary, further developed.

We wish to finish this section of the report with three key ideas: two are visible and are located in two of the overlapping areas Figure 4, and a third idea which is not visible or apparent.

The two visible ideas, are the interconnections at the Agency/Community field and the centrality of the volunteer role.

The hidden dimension is the demonstrable untapped potential (described more in Part B) at the local level available for harnessing.

This section discusses these ideas.

## Interconnections at the Agency/Community field.

The fuller text of the data in Part 2, brings home how much each of these domains overlap and *together* inform and influence community safety.

This research confirms the direction the Country Fire Service is taking in its Community Education program, particularly in relation to its emphasis on Community Fire Safe as a community based group method, but points to the need for more community members to have access to programs such as Community Fire Safe, and to a more stable presence of a community education facilitator.

Some residents took up the opportunity to participate in the Community Fire Safe program, and when it did not continue, sought other means of informing themselves. This group of interviewees on the whole perceived that this fire event could occur again. Those who were prepared had their efforts validated, and they learnt more about what else they could attend to for the future. Those who were less prepared were alerted to resources and people as sources for assistance.

We have taken the example of one case as an exemplar of the many influences which can occur, often quite accidentally, to increase people's risk awareness and capacity to respond. While there were several households who utilized more Community Education resources, or who had more 'historical' experience, such as generational farmers, (as further detailed in Part 2 of the report) we give this example in part because the household was perhaps more typical of newer residents into the region, who arrived with little awareness of fire and no experience with it.

"Case A" was the household who reported the factors in the table below:

**Table 4 Sources of Influence on awareness and preparedness, Case A**

| Influences on awareness and preparedness | "Origin" of influence |
|---|---|
| A 'handover' from the previous property owner which included raising awareness of fire and the resources which were available at the property to assist with fire response | Community initiated |
| A small fire shortly after their arrival | Context: experience |
| Being contacted by the brigade to update brigade records and learning more about local activities during the conversation | Agency |
| Having a CFS fuel reduction training session held at their property which highlighted particular issues they needed to address which they subsequently did. | Agency |
| Having neighbours who were CFS members | Community/Agency |
| Having internet skills to follow up on web based CFS educative materials which were brought to their attention. | Skills to access AEA activities |

This case example provides a snapshot of sources of influence which have their origins in at least 3 of the domains in Figure 4. One was 'community', in that a community minded vendor took the time to explain to the new residents some bushfire safety information. The brigade contact, and the availability of educative materials indicated an 'agency' domain, and neighbours as CFS members, being a source of influence in the Volunteer field, were right at the centre of the 'community' and 'agency' domain. At least one of the household members had the internet skills to download materials he had learnt existed, which the household members had digested to some degree.

This educative process can be speeded up by residents accessing Community Fire Safe groups, as two interviewees did, and in working in a group setting. In a group setting they can:

- learn more about preparedness
- learn about their neighbours

- access members of the brigade or even the Captain
- move toward greater self sufficiency where groups continue for longer than those in this research

While not all interviewees would have used a group setting, there was a strong preference expressed for a social component to learning more about fire safety. This can strengthen community relationships, relationships which in a fire event can become critical factors in warning, mutual assistance, and links in recovery.

## Centrality of Volunteer/Brigade presence

As noted above, the "Volunteer/Brigade" field forms part of the "interconnections" of the domains of "agency" and "community", but are brought into stronger relief in the diagram set out in Figure 4, for the spread of domains they cover. It is this spread which gives them special significance to our concern here, which is understanding how community members interact with the idea of the 'presence of the fire risk'.

At the centre of the diagram is the Volunteer field. It is the brigade, its members, its Captain (at least in this study in this region) which provides the 'connector' between many people: either through community members interaction with them at the community level, as neighbours, as local identities, and as the visible responders to a fire event, a response which was highly valued by the community. We recognise this is not so for everyone, and this goes to the issue - a repeating theme through this research - of the need for multiple channels through which community members can interact with each other, and with those people and resources which will assist them.

## Recognising untapped potential

We raise questions in this discussion about how to find and nurture the connections at the local community level, in order for us to better understand the concept of community self sufficiency in the bushfire context.

A feature of the bushfire context is that, in common with disaster mitigation in other areas, there are strong forces in favour of the prescriptive approach of simply issuing directions to a compliant community. However bushfire, unlike many disasters, is not generally characterised by an entirely unexpected event. Accordingly a comprehensive community approach is more appropriate, and likely to be more effective, in relation to bushfire than to some other disasters.

In any event we seek to counterbalance ideas of community development against the forces of prescription and in doing so, know we risk criticism and accusations of idealism, particularly as these ideas of community development are messy, require nurture, and may be slow to show fruit. The slow pace is challenging, and sometimes does not fit well with organizational requirements to respond in particular and often instrumental ways, to external pressures.

### Programs as a bridge

Programs are not an end in themselves. Community Education (CE) staff interact with some participants well after the 'program' has finished, or at least, after the five or so sessions which a program usually comprises. Some of these people keep in touch with a CE presence in various ways. Some ask for a 'seasonal top up', a one off visit from a Community Education Officer. Some

just ask for materials for their use, in case there are new program materials, so they can continue their work with new residents in their areas[8].

We do not know enough yet about the multiple ways in which community members use the Community Education service, a researchable topic in itself, particularly for what light it would throw from a program evaluation perspective. For our purposes here, the point is that programs provide a 'breeding ground' for people to do a range of things, one of which is to provide them with the confidence to assist others.

That some people want to work with others in this way was obvious through the research. Those who had formed into a Community Fire Safe group had already made the statement that they were willing to and wanted to work in this way. Some of those interviewed were either not familiar with this way of working, or perhaps not wanting this more intense contact, still expressed a strong desire to interact with others, to experience learning in a community context, and to get to know each other better. A few interviewees explicitly expressed a strong desire not to interact with others. Those who expressed a desire to interact more with others have been well documented in this research. Reasons cited included:

- a desire for information on fire preparedness presented in a community group situation
- a wish to learn while looking at other people's properties
- a wish to have someone assess their own property
- support for the task of bringing people together and sharing of other community information such as
    - one another's contact numbers
    - knowledge of others' resources,
    - knowledge of others' plans, and
    - knowledge of others' particular requirements, including any vulnerabilities.

Even the household with extensive house preparation including sprinklers, tanks, speedy capacity to fill gutters and so on, said they would like to learn about what others do and would be willing to share their technical expertise with others who visited their home. This is only a glimpse of ways in which members of the community with some knowledge and expertise who are not currently in roles where their particular knowledge and skills is recognised, could make a contribution.

These issues pose demands which cannot always be met. We know that the requests to the Community Education staff exceed their budgetary resources[9].

---

[8] The CE Unit of the CFS keeps some data on these more casual contact. With more resources, the CE Unit could develop an interesting picture of these different types of use community members make of their services. This would provide a better understanding of the inter dependencies between community members in their informality, and a more formal service.

[9] While the residents in the Mt Bold area are more sensitized to the threat of fire the community demand on community education from areas such as the Lower Eyre Peninsula, now nearly four years since that fire, outstrips the capacity of the community education officer to respond to all requests.

The small number of staff spread over the State will never satisfy the demand, although their having recently been taken off the sessional basis of employment should strengthen their capacity to think together over time about their roles and increase their geographic spread. They may also look critically, together with their host organization, at the best ways of approaching the enormous task that confronts the agency as a whole[10].

The Community Education staff cannot do this alone. They cannot be visible all over the state, identifiable to each Region and brigade who may wish to use their services, to each community group who may want to think about how to best prepare their constituents for the threat of fire. We saw the enormity of this task in our work in the Grampians in Victoria, when a group of agencies came together to look at the needs of those with disabilities living in a fire prone area. (Rosenbaum et al, 2008). This was also after a major fire, when community consciousness was high. To add complexity, there are many other organisations, both government, non government and volunteer organisations with interest in this broad field of community safety.

Sometimes the Community Fire Safe groups require assistance from other parts of the organization, in particular, from operational volunteers or volunteers who assist brigades administratively. These support resources can also become stretched, as we heard in the interviews. This discussion leads naturally, in our view, to an argument for more resources being made available for community support. These resources might come from the brigade side, where non operational recruits could be considered for community development work. These resources might also entail a stronger role for Community Education staff to seek additional capacity to assist in the education of and in the support of more community members who have capacities and a willingness to assist the fire service develop in this field.

## Involving others in assisting with community awareness raising

### Introduction

We think that careful thought and discussion needs to continue on the question of widening the domain of community education and awareness outside of the more specialised fire service community education staff, both operational volunteers and other community leaders.

There is an understandable and appropriate pressure to ensure that the ‘education message’ contains the most up to date ‘science’ and is delivered by people with adequate training in the principles of adult education. This drive,however, can also work to constrain thinking about just who can and should deliver the education message. To widen this perspective would also demand time and resources to think these issues through; the community

[10] Dunstan (2007) has provided examples of working closely through pre-existing community groups in her work on Kangaroo Island, as a vehicle for community education messages. Ayres (Community Education Officer, CFS) is engaged in similar work on Yorke Peninsula, as is Pedler (CFS) on Lower Eyre Peninsula. We have some research knowledge of the activities of these workers. While the Evaluation Project researchers will provide some work which will illuminate this emphasis, (particularly on Lower Eyre), the work that will not get documented through this research needs urgent attention, for its capacity to highlight the multiple ways in which community members and community educators are together contributing to this field of community safety

education function is clearly already stretched in meeting the daily demand from the community for assistance in preparing for fire.

There are other community roles which pertain to strengthening communities which are not fire specific, such as the important roles which are currently played by those who hold knowledge of community networks, and where these may be lacking. There is a lot of untapped potential at the community level for households to learn from and to assist each other. Our data on the importance of the presence of community infrastructure, both key people and key means for communication at the local level, supports this view of the potential for community strengthening, which will have a flow on effect of assisting the fire service in delivering community safety messages.

Research into the social and relational aspects of community connections and community safety, and the informal role played by key members of the community in these networks needs to continue. To make these connections it is necessary to speak out about the effect of these issues being undervalued at all levels: at the societal, the organizational and the community level. On the one hand they are so much part of the everyday as to be unremarkable. On the other, their undervaluing also has political implications, the scope and impact of which are beyond this research.

For many reasons these connections are hard to elicit making it challenging to argue for their importance. The result, commonly, is that we are left with an unbalanced emphasis on the more technical aspects of fire preparedness in the field. While these more technical aspects of fire preparedness are clearly critical, we need also to recognise the risk of excluding potentially valuable knowledge where the evidence base of desirable knowledge is unbalanced. The *human interdependency* visible through this data was palpable. We think we are all responsible for the task of trying to address the lack of balance between the technical and the relationship aspect of community safety.

## The volunteer domain

Volunteers are part of the social fabric of community life.

Community members look to operational volunteers for advice and support. We couldn't investigate this any further from the volunteer perspective, except to take on board the warning from one resident that operational volunteers were already stretched and their involvement in non operational work (either delivering or supporting the delivery of community education) could not be relied upon. Clearly any increase in non paid work in community awareness activities by volunteers needs to be explored in a way which recognises:

- the need for collaboration with Community Education roles
- the need for these roles to be articulated and agreed to
- that the Community Education function is currently under-resourced, and
- the risk of stress to volunteers if under-represented or under-resourced

## Community roles at the community level

<u>Infrastructure</u>

In addition to volunteers being part of the fabric of community life, so too are the following elements of social infrastructure: the General Store, the

Community Newsletter and other structures or mediums mentioned as part of community 'awareness raising' in this report. We have seen in our other research the importance of businesses performing the role of community 'clearing house' of information such as was provided by the General Store/Post Office in this research. The Community Forum and Community Newsletter are also important mechanisms through which community members hear of and have the opportunity to respond to community activities from which they might benefit and to which they might contribute. How these community resources can be supported and strengthened needs further thought.

Opportunities for leadership

As mentioned earlier, there is a potential dilemma between self sufficiency and neighbourliness.

There is a possibility that a policy direction toward self sufficiency, if delivered without a parallel emphasis on the social context, could lead to a situation where households become so prepared and internally household focussed, as to weaken the strength of connections to others in the community. We saw a glimpse of this potential in this study. Those who have done the work to prepare for fire, and whose awareness of what can be and needs to be done is high, may become self absorbed. Conversely, we also saw examples of people who did not know what to do gravitating toward those who did. This can lead to a point where, understandably, those who *don't* know becoming seen as a community encumbrance.

It is early days in the development of ideas about and practices of community self sufficiency in this field. However, there are some 'champions' at the community level who have invested a lot of time, resources and expertise in their own preparation. We saw at least one family who had made such an investment, but rather than slip into a solely self preoccupied state, they were prepared to share what they knew with other community members.

To formally respond to community members willing to assist others would require resources, but it may be worth considering, as just one way of thinking about how to nurture stronger responses at the community level, where these can be shared and where others can benefit. This would also encourage the 'social' side of the 'self sufficiency' question.

## Ideas to guide thinking and discussion

### Subsidiarity

We introduce here the term "subsidiarity". The principle of subsidiarity is the idea that government is best achieved when administered at the lowest relevant level. That is, a level of government (in the broadest sense) should only perform those functions which cannot be effectively and efficiently undertaken by a lower level of government. It follows that decisions should be made at the level at which they are enacted and require the imprimatur of the salient group to which they will apply. (Lowell, 2006).

This principle was also reflected in other work of Program C7, in the Concept Mapping work (Elsworth et al, 2008) and the work examining the principles in the post fire event Inquiries (Elsworth et al, 2009). In both these pieces of work, ideas of the importance of 'local' as the space in which to organise, was repeated. In the concept mapping work, desired outcomes were seen as "neighbourhood networks and partnerships'. In the Inquiries work, foundational

principles included “understand local people and community’, ‘local planning to mitigate risks’, ‘localised information provision’ was seen as a desirable activity.

In Emergency Management, there is understandably an historical emphasis on issues of power and control. This can partly be explained by one of the key reasons for the sector to exist – to ‘take over’, when events get beyond the capacity of communities to manage. It can also be explained by the logic that it is best for some activities to be carried out at a central level – not every community needs to produce its own publications or have its own website or work to translate research findings into its own practices. But when it comes to prevention and preparedness, there needs to be available to people the means to be involved in decisions which affect them.

How this principle might be realised in this field requires more thought and discussion with the range of involved parties including community members. We have argued that there is more untapped potential at a community level than is being taken up. The principle of subsidiarity leads us to ask – what roles can be taken up at a community level and what roles must only be carried out by those ‘formally responsible’ for a particular function. What these various roles and functions might be in community safety in particular localities requires careful discussion with a range of stakeholders.

## Cooperation and interdependency between domains

Table 4 above outlines the circumstances of Case A – a household where, as new residents, they were rung by the brigade when the brigade was updating its records. In doing this, the brigade person also drew the attention of the household to when Community Education information sessions were being run. The community member who runs the Community Newsletter also placed a notice in the Newsletter about community education programs.

There were other examples of this ‘overlap’ of function in the research. There is clearly room for more of this, both within the organization, for more valuing of each others’ roles and functions, between the agency and the community, and within households. In the latter case, we know from this and other research (Goodman and Cottrell, 2009), that men are the principal custodians of bushfire knowledge and experience in many households. An increased ‘role overlap’ with other household members is desirable and would lead to safer outcomes.

These forms of interdependency in community safety in relation to the threat of fire, particularly from the point of view of ordinary members of the community, are critically important. We acknowledge however that these ideas are applicable to community development in general. Community resources are often limited and working toward enhancing community connectedness is a desirable activity for a range of reasons, only one of which is to mitigate the effect of fire. Local context as a location for community safety initiatives is particularly important for a number of reasons.

Community members live a large part of their lives in local contexts, and therefore conceptualizations of ‘community’ can be particularly ‘grounded’ – that is, they are shaped by where people physically live, and the perception of risk is commonly associated strongly with a particular landscape - although we recognise that the identification of ‘risk’ is contested. Moreover, the services are organized on a ‘spatial basis’, so that a local brigade for instance, will be that – a *local* brigade.

The ‘groundedness’ or ‘spatial relevance’ of ideas of community in community safety, gives weight to the idea that the most desirable aim of any intervention

is to assist the public *where* they live, with the questions they raise which are often very related to *their own contexts*. Accordingly, any unit of the fire service which community members might interact should at least be capable of sufficient flexibility to be able to respond from as comprehensively integrated a basis as possible.

## The agency in the community

At the organizational level, operational volunteers need to know what is required to do their operational response job well.

While the formal Community Education function is outside their 'local' territory, the volunteer brigade members, when interacting at the household or community level, need to be able to impart *enough* knowledge or skill to deal comprehensively with the issue at hand with the means to involve others as needed. This principal would apply too to the Community Education worker who encounters community members with needs or capacities which cannot be addressed by the Community Education presence or program.

This might be a question which a Region or Brigade could answer or at least respond to more appropriately. In these situations, each unit of the organization needs enough variability in its response capacity to be able to act in a comprehensive way, and cross refer to other parts of the organization. The cross referring may also need to be made to the community, where the particular knowledge, skill or relationship required may be vested in another, or an 'ordinary' community member. Initially this may be a matter of consulting the community member, such as a person known to have knowledge of and entree to local networks. In time this should lead to a more active role for community members to be recognised as key participants in local planning for emergencies.

## The household in the community

At the household level, the same principle applies.

While it is a normal part of family life to divide functions between household members, these functional divisions are often just that: very functional, as in making best use of each member's time, commitments, and strengths. These functional divisions are problematic if they become stereotypes, and also when roles are cast with rigidity. This becomes problematic when the member who had taken responsibility for, in this case, knowledge of fire preparedness, is absent. However, while the need for an increase in functional redundancy at the household level is reasonably clear in principal, as we know from our own lives, role allocation within households, or rather, seeking to change a pre-existing role allocation, is among one of the hardest of life's tasks. It can challenge some very deeply held aspects of one's identity and the identity of other household members.

It is particularly important for communities to be able to access some community group environments in which members can explore these complex issues. Households need to examine their own individual roles and any consequences from these role allocations which might increase their vulnerability. The data in this research showing the dilemma some women experienced, between staying with their husbands to defend their properties and leaving with children is one such exploration household members may choose to engage in, either in their own households or in a community group setting.

## Resources

Resources are scarce at the brigade level and the community education level thus, paradoxically, making the issue of interdependency between domains even more important. The resource scarcity suggests that it may be difficult for community education staff and volunteers to respond to each community question in the detail community members may desire. At the same time, each community question might be a hook or a medium for other questions and issues to be addressed.[11].

The resource scarcity is also a reminder that there may be other community members with capacity and willingness to assist with the community safety messages and tasks. The means need to be found to value and develop these relationships, and together with these community members, conceptually carve out roles and tasks which would be appropriate, satisfying, recognised, and useful in contributing to greater community safety.

These are community development functions and processes and themselves will require resources. We would argue that community roles in community safety should not be thought about as necessary *only* because there are problems with operational brigade and community education resourcing. They should be regarded as policy directions which have at their core, the recognition that people invest more in matters they have collectively played some role determining (Cheers, 2002). This understanding or belief lies at the heart of the much aspired to community self sufficiency, as it does at the heart of shared responsibility. Further developing ideas about community self sufficiency and shared responsibility and what they each mean in practice , in local contexts, is important work requiring dialogue at the local level.

## Residents' trust in the CFS

The fact that many interviewees had very positive views of the CFS as a trusted source of information adds weight to our emphasis that a more integrated service across the various functional areas, would build on the strengths the public associate with the service.

Of course this vesting of trust is not a straightforward and uni directional phenomena. There are a number of readings one can make about the positive comments about the volunteers. One is the very positive regard for the sacrifices volunteers make – not just of their time, but the risk to their safety, and their absence from their own families at particularly critical times. That residents wished to use the opportunity of community meetings after the fire to thank the volunteers, testifies to the dynamic of positive regard. Their role as responders to community need was appreciated, even if the organization as a site for organizational politics was for some a negative factor.

While there might be many reasons people choose to volunteer, one clear reason for many is that they do it for their local community as well as for

[11] There were examples in the research of unintended impacts of contact with the brigade, where one interviewee reported that after being involved in some 'audit' of water supplies available for fire fighting in the area, he went and bought a pump. It may be that those doing the 'audit' for brigade purposes also took the opportunity for some awareness raising of participants – but this was not how the story was reported. This points to the importance of ANY contact between the public and the brigade as an opportunity for transmission of information, and also the importance of openness of boundaries, for the public to be able to approach volunteers with questions and comments. The handling of these comments and questions require more discussion.

themselves. This is a delicate area of interaction between volunteers and community members, and one which warrants more sensitive research and organizational attention.

The fact that the volunteer is also a trusted source of information in the eyes of many members of the community, adds weight to the argument that two of the key functions of the fire service, the operational fire fighting and the community education role, need to be as closely integrated as possible, or indeed, to be prepared to operate side by side. A current CFS Community Education project is exploring the possibility of formally revisiting and extending the operational role to also include a community education role[12].

## Supporting the capacity to 'imagine'

The importance the fire service places on the existence of community based groups, such as Community Fire Safe, is critical for the opportunities which are provided for people to be able to access specialised information, and to listen to each other and explore the challenges they face to become 'fire ready'.

Inviting community members to take fire safety seriously also poses the problem that roles must be found for all parties to contribute. Community fire safe facilitators, community members, brigade captains and members, regional and head office staff must all be fully involved, as must residents including family members, and staff and members of other relevant organisations.

It is important that these interactions are managed in ways that ways which maximise interchange and open up the field for exploration, and interrogation. While the notion of assisting thoughts to surface may sound too abstract, it finds resonance with the idea put to one of the researchers by the Chief Fire Officer (CFS): that a key challenge is to find more ways to help people '*imagine'*.[13]

In this discussion the Chief Fire Officer was emphasising the importance he gave to the issue of 'imagination' in the context of his interest in supporting some documentary film making about fire. This documentation, which had South Australian content, might help people *'imagine'* that fire *could* happen to them, and to anticipate how they might respond. Our research would support the idea that 'imagination' is an important mechanism for anticipating the threat of fire. Its importance also suggests that we think of the *circumstances under which* we can 'imagine'. What sorts of environments most facilitate the capacity for imagination? What environments have the most potential to trigger the most 'acute' or relevant or meaningful imaginings in this field of community safety?.

One issue we know to be relevant to this issue is that of *identity*. Are the people one is 'observing', either in a film, or reading about, or thinking about, or hearing discussed at a meeting like 'Community Fire Safe', 'like me'? Do they look like or sound like or live like me? In what other ways are they similar to me? In part the idea of generating 'South Australian' material is theoretically supported by this idea of 'identity'. It is a common occurrence for some people to identify with the State they live in, and (at least some of) the residents of that state. This is one means through which people engage with a message.

---

[12] This project is known as VOICE – Volunteers in Community Education; http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/education/voice_volunteers_in_community_education.jsp; accessed 5th May 2009

[13] Discussion between Helen Goodman and Euan Ferguson, Chief Fire Officer, CFS Head Office, May 08

So finding materials and opportunities to evoke issues of identity to facilitate imagination are important. The CFS has since produced a DVD which features the voices and experiences of South Australian residents[14].

## The 'Them and Us' dichotomy

Barriers to imagining include the organizational contexts in which we find ourselves. In every walk of community life and every organizational context, we have divisions of 'us' and 'them'. In this study, some residents saw an '*us*' as the 'community' and the brigade as a *'them'*. Some saw the 'brigade' as an '*us*' and the 'Regional Office' or 'Head Office' as a '*them*'. We might see our research group as an '*us*' and the University administration, or the fund administrators, or the Commonwealth Government Research Policy administrators as a '*them*'. These 'splits' are ubiquitous in all settings[15].

There is relevant theory which provides some understanding of the dynamics which *cause* these splits, which will not be elaborated on here. But one structural idea which can minimise the effect of such splits, is to develop 'safe spaces' for discussion of complex and difficult ideas. It is in this space, if 'safe' enough, that there is potential to recognise the dynamics which cause or fuel these splits, and then to work to break them down. Both with the structure of the creation of an adequate *space*, and the particular elements of *dialogue* as a practice, these together can operate as one of the few means available to us to increase our capacity to imagine, to imagine what it might be like for 'someone else', or imagining what pressures someone else is under, or is trying to address.

We particularly emphasise the importance of these ideas to the task of imagining, as without them it is easy to close down our thinking and be lead into dogmatic or 'instructive' thinking. One example of this would be the erroneous belief that fires can always be controlled and people can be protected. Another would be that we could keep community members safe if only they did what they were told. The environment of bushfire preparedness is particularly frightening and it is in these circumstances that people will, understandably, seek unrealistic or didactic reassurance. Accordingly the temptation to agencies to be didactic is also understandable. However it goes against the principles of how adults actually learn. We will focus our final comments at the agency level, while recognising that similar arguments can be made for discussion at the community level.

### Managing the Split Resources argument

This seems to be an appropriate place to raise an important issue in the context of resource allocation.

There is a common approach to requests for increases in resources which is essentially along the lines of: "well if you want more of x what parts of y do you

---

[14] CFS DVD entitled: Are You Bushfire Ready; http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/news_media/campaigns/bushfire_ready_dvd.jsp; accessed 5th May 2009

[15] A field of study known as systems psychodynamics provides considerable insights into organizational dynamics. It is an interdisciplinary field which attempts to integrate the emerging insights of group relations theory, psychoanalysis, and open systems theory (Gould et al, 2001). See http://www.ispso.org/Symposia/symposia.htm; accessed 5th May 2009, for archival symposia

want to eliminate?". In our experience this fundamentally bureaucratic argument is deceptive, in that it relies on unfounded assumptions about the nature of public funding. Moreover, and more importantly, in our experience this argument is almost always associated with an attempt to create discord and division amongst groups that would otherwise be natural allies. We have used the term "splits" above to refer to the 'us and them' dichotomy, we use the term 'splits' again here to refer to this argument. Recognition of the destructive nature of this argument does not mean that there are not legitimate resource allocation questions to be addressed and answered.

In the current context one such potential 'split' is the 'big red trucks' (or in South Australia, the 'big white' trucks) versus the dollars spent on community education. We think that while it is legitimate and appropriate to seek more community education resources, the community would be most vexed, we believe, if the resourcing question was publicly put to them, as an 'either or' – either more trucks or more community education. The threat of annihilation by fire is very real and the symbolism represented by the fire trucks is clearly a source of reassurance against the fear of annihilation by fire. This adds complexity to the task of dealing rationally with the question of resource allocation. This study is one component of the answer to that question, and another, indispensable component is that the issue be addressed in an appropriately democratic process.

## Functional redundancy in information delivery

We introduce here the term "functional redundancy". This term is not in every day use and may require some explanation. Functional redundancy– first used in biology - refers to the capacity of a system to perform successfully even when one or several component parts have failed. It is an essential feature of robust system design and an attempt to make strengthen system properties.

This research demonstrates that the public informs itself in a range of ways about the threat of fire. In these circumstances, functional redundancy is achieved by ensuring that key pieces of information are located, ie repeated, in many places. Functional redundancy here also requires that the information be accessible in different locations and sectors. This requires a greater level of communication between the 'parts' of the organization which hold 'bits' of the picture.

In addition to the intra organizational communication required, the communication also needs to be community wide, as some bits of the community also hold bits of the puzzle. In this research, in terms of information dissemination, the person who runs the Community Newsletter, the Kangarilla Voice, who advertised a notice about Community Fire Safe, which some residents had been, held a bit of this puzzle. However here we concentrate to a large degree on internal fire service structures and communication processes. The basis of increased intra organizational communication between the various sections of the fire service would need to be resourced for this communication to occur.

This communication would also need:

- a high degree of mutual appreciation and knowledge of each others' current roles
- more resources to facilitate this communication and to *increase the reach* of what can be achieved

- a *widening of roles* where there is the willingness and capacity to do this at the operational level broadening into more community awareness roles, and
- a willingness for Community Education staff to examine developing leadership roles in community members and delegating some of the community awareness functions.

If it could be achieved, this last initiative would leave those with the expertise both to support those community members in leadership roles, and to allow a more in-depth exploration of how the most marginalised community residents can be included in general community awareness activities.

Finally, for this section, it is worth restating that it is still early days in the journey towards understanding the tasks and requirements of the various roles in raising effectively community awareness about the threat of fire.

## Summary of 1.6 Discussion

- The challenges faced by people in responding to a fire event are immensely complex and include many factors that can be neither controlled nor anticipated. Accordingly, prescriptive approaches have limited value and the most effective preparation entails developing in residents a high degree of awareness and knowledge of all aspects of fire preparation and management. This is best achieved with
  - a diversity of program types
  - a range of environments
  - a diversity of modes of presentation
  - a range of levels of detail and sophistication in information
- Research confirmed that, while every aspect or source of information had value, those that stood out as being critical included:
  - the Community Fire Safe program
  - the role of the Community Education Officer
  - community or group meetings, particularly those that enabled contact with neighbours
  - activities that involved contact with Brigade members
- Overwhelmingly residents found informal contact with Brigade members valuable in one or more of a diverse range of contexts.
- The on-going nature of bushfire threat and preparation strongly indicates the appropriateness of community based rather than prescriptive approaches to bushfire management.
- For most residents, as well as simply imparting information, community meetings were welcomed for also prompting:
  - information exchange among neighbours
  - recognition of areas of vulnerability in their own properties and those of neighbours
  - an increased confidence to seek specific information from Brigade members
  - a wish to have their own properties assessed

- The importance of community networks to bushfire safety is such that relevant agencies can appropriately foster enhanced community networks in ways that may not necessarily involve bushfire directly.
- The role of conventional education processes in bushfire safety is both sufficiently important and sufficiently onerous that agencies should examine ways to facilitate greater involvement of appropriate members of the ordinary community in this task.
- There is enthusiasm from some residents for increased non-operational roles for volunteers, most often in education. While this is attractive, caution is needed, as without appropriate additional resources, volunteers may be overstretched.
- Flexibility is required in comprehensively recognising the diversity of elements that go to make up the social infrastructure of a community, and each element deserves attention for its potential role in bushfire safety.
- There is a potential dilemma between self sufficiency and neighbourliness in bushfire preparation. A partial solution might be informally to promote some well prepared residents as community champions and encourage a knowledge exchange with their less prepared neighbours.
- It is important to recognise that many of the pressures operating on emergency management in general will also operate in the bushfire context. It is also important to recognise that the on-going nature of bushfire threat distinguishes it from most other disasters.
- The principle of subsidiarity should be recognised as desirable in the context of bushfire preparation and management. Accordingly it is appropriate to consider which roles can be fulfilled at a community level and which must be carried out by those formally responsible for a particular function.
- The application of the principle of subsidiarity also prompts us to reiterate our view that in the context of bushfire management there is more potential for leadership at a community level than is being realised currently.
- A recurrent finding was the combination of the importance of the role of the Community Education staff together with recognition of the limitation that they faced in terms of their numbers and resources.
- While there are understandable reasons to want to maintain tight control on the detail of the message being communicated by the professional education staff, there is, in our view, scope to examine expanding the range of people charged with this responsibility. This expansion would require appropriate additional resources.
- The difficulty in defining the diverse and sometimes diffuse social influences on community organisation in the bushfire context has lead to a concentration on the technical aspects of fire management that has tended to exclude many other important considerations.
- A key factor in community preparedness for bushfire is recognition of the importance of the interplay of both cooperation and interdependency in community networks. These aspects are complex and difficult to summarise, but understanding can be gained from the application of more general community models.

- An important component of preparation for bushfire was articulated by the Chief Fire Officer when he stated that: “a key challenge is that we have to find more ways to help people ‘*imagine’*.” Stimulating imagination is a mechanism for reducing the temptation for people to think that “it can’t happen to me”. We call this last view ‘insularity’.
- The risk of insularity is also reduced if people are able to identify with those portrayed as bushfire victims in film, in other media, or in personal presentations.
- The issue of identity also raises the question of the ‘them and us’ dichotomy. Examples of this dichotomy are a ubiquitous feature of community life. In the context of bushfire this dichotomy is significant for its role in encouraging insularity.
- Agencies need to recognise the danger to community cohesion that would result from communities being put in a position requiring them to make resource allocation choices that would impact negatively on particular sectors.
- A desirable degree of functional redundancy in information delivery can be achieved by ensuring that key pieces of information are located, ie repeated, in many different locations and sectors; this requires a high level of specific communication.

# Part Two: Results in Detail

## 2.1: Decision making in relation to the threat of fire

### Pre fire event thoughts and decisions

Stay and Defend or Leave Early

Prior to the fire, of the 18 households:

- 12 households had formed a view that they would stay in the event of a fire although 3 of these were conditional
- 2 indicated they would leave
- one had partners with opposing views
- one who had no apparent view, and
- 2 cases were unclear[16],

Of the 12 cases who had a plan to stay and defend

- 9 described their 'stay and defend' decision as 'unqualified' – that this would be their decision regardless and 3 of these had written plans
- 3 we describe as conditional. All of these 3 had previous fire experience, one, a farmer, said that his decision would depend on an assessment at the time. The other 2 said that they would stay unless it was a firestorm. They were the only two interviewees who used this word 'firestorm'.

Of the 2 who planned to leave, at least one of them, while saying they had a plan to leave, also expected that they would be told when to leave. The other had a plan to come home from work, collect animals, and leave.

In the household where the two partners had opposing views, one wanted to stay and one wanted to leave.

We have described 2 as 'unclear'. An example of this lack of clarity comes from one of the households in which the resident, in relation to her husband said:

> We've discussed this but….. I'm quite sure that he wouldn't be so stupid as to stay if it was just *there* ……

### Actual responses during the event: those who had planned to stay

All the households who had planned beforehand to stay did so, except for one household who had to modify their plan because of their circumstances on the day of the fire, for reasons which pertained to the location of their vehicles due to holiday plans. This couple left the property in separate vehicles, and the husband stopped to assist neighbours and then went home to defend the property.

[16] One was unclear because of loss of data through technical difficulties, and the other due to one member of the household need to leave the interview before we had finished clarifying issues around 'intent' re the stay or go decision.

### Actual responses during the event: those who had planned to leave.

Neither of the two households that had plans to leave actually left during the fire. Nor did the two households who we designated above as 'wait and see', actually leave. Of the two about whose decision making intent we were uncertain, one went to assist others, as she deemed her home not to be under threat. The second one in this group wanted to leave with non resident visiting younger family members. However, she felt torn about this, as she also did not want to leave her husband, and in the event, she and visiting family ended up staying and assisting the husband actively defend their property.

In the body of this report we offer some observations on the range of factors that influence these decisions, and some evidence around the role of programs in influencing these decisions.

### House Preparation

In other work (Goodman and Rowe, 2008) we have distinguished between 'house' preparation and 'household' preparation. By the former we mean activities which pertain to the property preparation and the latter, the work with household members, pets, etc – the more 'human,' 'interactive,' 'relational,' aspects of planning. Our data on the house preparation is the least detailed in this research, as we were asked to focus particularly on the factors influencing members in their responses together as a household. The data on house preparedness are filtered through nearly all part of this Results section. Here we offer only a brief summary.

Eleven households had fire pumps to ensure a supply of water when the power cut out. Many people had sprinkler systems on the house and/or gardens and fire hoses.

The majority of people ensured that they kept grass low near their house and many people keep stock for the primary purpose of keeping paddocks around the house well grazed. Several people had planted with fires in mind, avoiding natives near the house.

One resident used flood irrigation to keep a paddock near the house green during summer.

## 2.2: CFS Education and awareness programs

### Introduction

The CFS hosts many different education and engagement activities, aimed at communities to educate and promote awareness, interest and safety in relation to bushfires. These activities emanate from different sections of the organisation. For example

- the Incident Management Team in a regional context during a large fire event is responsible for generating information for warnings
- the Media Unit of Head Office manages this information and liaises with the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) the official broadcaster

- the Community Education Unit runs a range of programs, including Community Fire Safe, Bushfire Blitz and hosts other information events
- regional staff engage in both planning and community engagement functions within the Region, and
- volunteer members at the brigade level host a variety of community level awareness raising activities.

There are other programs which we don't have any information on which would also have some community impact, such as the Cadets program.

This research brief emanated from the Community Education Unit, and this accounts for the initial focus of this report on an exploration of the extent to which different approaches to community education and engagement had influenced people's level of awareness, preparedness, and response to the actual fire event. Interviewees were asked what they could recall about media campaigns, CFS publications and different types of community meetings and the impact of these approaches. In this report we have differentiated between three types of community meetings:

- Community Fire Safe Group meetings – meetings of residents in a local area organised by a CFS Community Education Officer that are hosted by one of the residents a series of and typically entail about five meetings.
- Preparedness meetings – providing information about how to prepare for a bushfire at a community meeting held at a public venue, often the local brigade offices. These are usually 'one off meetings' such as Bushfire Blitz.
- Community Briefings – public meetings convened either during or shortly after a fire to inform communities about a specific fire event and to get feedback from the community about a specific fire.

## Community Education: Agency account of activities

Community Education Officers advised us that the events as described in the following table, have been held in the Mt Bold area.

**Table 5 Community Education, Awareness and Engagement (EAE) Activities (Mt Bold)**

| Event Type | Location | Date Held | *Description* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Community debrief | Kangarilla | 11/01/2007 | *Community briefing held during fire event* |
| Community debrief | Echunga | 11/01/2007 | *Community briefing held during fire event* |
| Community debrief | Kangarilla residents | 23/01/2007 | *Update and debrief about fire 2 weeks after fire event* |
| Community Fire Safe | Kangarilla | Started 2002 | *4 meetings held in total, last meeting held 18/01/03. No Community Education Officer assistance since 2003* |
| Bushfire Blitz | Echunga CFS Station | 2003/2004 - Season | |
| Workshops | Meadows | 2004/2005 – Season | *Rural Workshop* |
| Workshops | Community meeting | 2004/2005 – Season | *Community Meeting* |
| Brigade Challenge | Kangarilla | 2007/2007 – Season | |
| Brigade Challenge | Clarendon | 16/11/2006 | |
| *Land Management Program – Bushfire Lecture* | | | |

Table 6 below sets out data from this study on the various EAE activities we detected in our research sample.

Essentially in our sample of 18, we found no Community Fire Safe Groups operating at the 'top' level of the model, being groups operating beyond the first season. We found 2 examples of what we are calling an early and interrupted Community Fire Safe process; 4 examples of attendance of preparatory meeting or activity; 10 examples of attendance at a briefing meeting, during or directly after the fire; 15 examples of recalling awareness raising advertisements, 4 examples of utilising websites for preparation information prior to fire, 3 examples of utilising websites during the event for fire information, and 8 accounts of the utility of radio coverage.

## Table 6 CFS Education, Awareness and Engagement Activities

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Community Fire Safe Groups beyond 1st season<br>CFS provides support and opportunity for residents to maintain own direction.<br>Groups participate in working bees, develop warning systems such as telephone trees, Incorporate other members of community into group, build repour with local Brigades and develop community response plans. | | No examples in this case study. |
| Community Fire Safe 1st season<br>CFS Education Officers facilitate group meetings. Process utilise adult learning techniques and aims to build individual knowledge as well provide opportunity and setting for the development of community capacity/resilience<br>Throughout learning process emphasis is placed on individuals developing and rehearsing a household bushfire action plan. | Other CFS activities that could also be considered as collaboration<br>Examples are<br>Property inspections CFS burning off for training purposes<br>Cadets | 2 examples of an early and interrupted Community Fire Safe process. |
| Bushfire Planning Workshops/Brigade Challenge nights.<br>Utilises CFS Community education personnel to develop and deliver information often in conjunction with other agency staff and programs and CFS<br>Incorporates fire planning with other issues eg natural resource management, fire fighting equipment, recovery planning. | | 6 examples of attendance of preparatory meeting or activity |
| Bushfire Blitz /community hall meetings<br>Targets at risk communities' eg street corner meeting in high-risk suburb or area, or high risk demographic eg nursing home staff and residents, tourist going into high risk locations. Didactic approach<br>Public meetings during incidents | | 10 examples of attendance at a briefing meeting, during or directly after the fire. |
| Media advertisements /CFS Booklets, Website (pre or post event)<br>Provides a clear and consistent message, utilises high impact image or high profile personnel to promote message<br>2006/2007 CFS planning guide media campaign. Ads promoting importance of planning | | 15 examples of recalling awareness<br>raising advertisements<br>4 examples of utilising websites for preparation information prior to fire.<br>One case recalled information from the council. In another example the interviewee had known a CE officer personally/socially |
| Bushfire Information and Warning messages including website during event.<br>Specific information relating to situation and target audience. | | 3 examples of utilising websites during the event for fire information<br>2 examples of radio coverage reported as useful<br>6 examples of radio coverage reported as not useful; 1 example of information not available. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Some interviewees were aware that the reintroduction of using the siren as a warning device was under discussion. |

## Community Meetings: Researchers' account of community interest

While Table 6 above provides an outline of differing levels of engagement, this detail perhaps clouds a broader issue we wanted to comment on before we discuss the programs and activities. This is that interviewees (and no doubt community members in general) are 'differently disposed' towards meetings in general in relation to fire safety. Table 7 below provides a snapshot of our broad categorisation of interviewee's interest in meetings in general .

**Table 7: Interest in meetings in general**

| A: Interested | | B: Not Interested | | C: Conditionally interested | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interest already demonstrated. Would like more | 1 | Leave it to the younger ones | 1 | Difficulty with time | 2 | |
| General preparedness | 3 | Farming has prepared us for fire[17] | 3 | Only if meeting topic relevant to me | 1 | |
| Briefing | 2 | | | Only if 'information only meetings' no interaction wanted | 1 | |
| To specifically increase knowledge of neighbours | 1 | | | Only offered with opportunities for social interaction as well | 1 | |
| Willing to share what they have learnt | 1 | | | | | |
| Need to voice distress at briefing meeting | 1 | | | | | |
| Totals | 9 | | 4 | | 5 | 18 |

[17] One interviewee also put the view that she had 'learnt in the past that the CFS don't listen if you're not involved with them'. However we have only recorded one reason for her response to meetings and that was the one we regarded as 'dominant'.

### A: Interested in meetings

Those whom we categorise in A as interested in fire safety meetings are discussed at some length later in the results section.

### B: Not interested in meetings

We identified 4 households who voiced a lack of interest in attending bushfire safety meetings. These accounts however cannot be taken as being 'frozen in time'. As in many complex social issues, these views on interest in meetings may vary over time, vary from person to person within the household, and may show some variation within the one person's voiced views. One woman said this to us about her husband:

> [He] has always taken the farmer's attitude that he doesn't have to go to meetings and all that kind of thing. If anyone needs help he's there with his backpack and his water sprayer, and that's the way it's been, always been.

Despite this, this farmer did attend one of the community *briefing* meetings, perhaps indicating that meetings during a fire event are seen as potentially valuable to those who otherwise would not usually attend meetings in relation to fire safety. This would seem to be true, given the large numbers of community members who typically attend briefing meetings, at least in this South Australia and Victoria.

Another reason offered for not attending meetings was being past the age of active community membership exemplified by attending meetings.

> You get to the stage where you really don't want to go to meetings. Both of us have spent a lot of our professional lives at meetings – been there, done that, might suit other people who are younger. We are both in our seventies. Younger people can go to meetings and wear themselves out

For members of three households, there was the feeling that they did not need additional knowledge about fire safety. The following sentiments were expressed by two women with farming experience:

> I've been a country girl all my life and I didn't go to them [fire education meetings] because, well, you deal with it when it happens… I think I've got a pretty good picture of what we need to do.
>
> I think in my own situation I've been here long enough and I've got enough common sense to know, and have a plan.

The male in the third household had had past fire fighter training in another state.

One of the interviewees already quoted above, ("I've been here long enough") also felt that she had learnt in the past that her views would not be heard.

> I knew what would happen, I just knew that there was no way that people were going to take any notice of us residents who weren't involved in the CFS, because it's happened before.

### C: Conditionally interested

We categorised 5 households as being 'conditionally interested.'

Two of these five households provided a condition which, if met, might encourage them to attend a meeting. In one case a farmer said he might consider attending if the topic was of interest, and the other if the meeting was structured in such a way that would limit community interaction and discussion.

Two other households expressed that they would have an interest in meetings in relation to fire safety but would probably be unable to attend due to time commitments. Both these households however had used and were using other means of accessing information.

The final householder in this group had been frustrated with community meetings in general, and felt community members can take too narrow a view of the issue at hand. He had spent a considerable part of his past professional life having to manage the public in meeting situations. This person described himself as a 'big picture' person. However, we placed him in this 'conditionally interested' category, as he would be more attracted to community meetings if they also provided opportunity for social interaction.

## Community Fire Safe group meetings

In the foregoing we have looked at perceptions in relation to meetings in general, in this section we examine the perceptions of residents specifically to Community Fire Safe meetings.

Two of the 18 households interviewed recalled specific detail about attending a Community Fire Safe meeting a few years prior to the Mt Bold fire. One person had experience as a CFS volunteer and the other person had hosted a meeting at his residence that had been attended by about 12 people from around eight households. People were invited because they lived nearby. The meeting was organised by a CFS Community Education Officer who presented information at the meeting together with a local Brigade Captain. Only one meeting was held, and as there was no follow up contact between those who attended it is arguable as to whether a 'group' had formed.

The meeting was based at a local resident's home. The meeting content recalled included a property inspection where both the good and the problematic in terms of fire preparedness was identified and discussed. Both of the interviewees (separate households in our study) who had attended, reported learning new things about how to improve their level of preparedness. The person who had hosted a meeting identified gaps in his knowledge which prompted him to seek further information and attend other community information events run by the CFS.

One interviewee noted:

> I listened with interest to what this woman said … about what you should do,… about making a safe area around the place and being prepared…We walked around …It was sort of a practical look at where you should go to and how you should get rid of things and what you should clean up and that basically was the first time I knew about it. I would suggest that some of the people who were there were caught in this fire because the fire came straight through that area there. They might have learnt. It might have saved their properties, it might have even saved their lives. I took it up myself because I thought it was useful. I came home and said we need to have …overalls, a fire bag, the radio …that's when I came home with that idea …We talked about it, we actually came up with a fire plan. When the fire was here we pulled the hoses out and plugged up… we did a fair bit….

The other interviewee who had attended the Community Fire Safe meeting described the benefit to him and his family as follows:

> We thought there was going to be some benefit for us in having it here cause they can use the examples that we have around as, both the good and the bad …We did a bit of a theory question and answer, went for a walk and had a look at some of the features here. Other people related their own particular circumstances to what they saw. There were questions about trees that people had right next to their house and whether they had to chop them down.

The person who had hosted the meeting observed that some of the people at the meeting were clearly knowledgeable and active in their bushfire preparation, while for others the meeting was a starting point for thinking about preparedness. He found the meeting had been reassuring and had also identified gaps in his level of preparedness.

> …To that point we thought, oh it's probably risky here, but we were quite reassured after the CFS had been here and gone through all the points…After the session we had here, I think the indication was that we probably need to go and find out a little bit more to make sure that we get it …We didn't have a plan. I knew what I should do but there was nothing written down.

Following the Community Fire Safe meeting this person attended other CFS community information events that were very helpful in developing a more sophisticated understanding of how to improve levels of preparedness. He developed a plan together with members of his household. A teenager in the household typed up the plan which was visible in the kitchen during our interview.

The person who had hosted the Community Fire Safe meeting was approached by the Community Education worker about a follow up meeting. However, this follow up meeting did not go ahead, although the reasons for the lack of follow up were unknown to the interviewee. There was also no follow up on developing a telephone tree which had been discussed at the original meeting and considered a good idea by residents who were present.

The other 16 households had not been to a Community Fire Safe group meeting and most had not heard of the Community Fire Safe program. When the program was briefly described by interviewers a few people remembered having heard about the program when attending a local Forum where a local CFS Brigade Captain had spoken about bushfire preparedness and the Community Fire Safe program. We were shown a newsletter called the "Kangarilla Voice" in which this particular Forum was mentioned. This most recent Kangarilla Voice newsletter had been distributed not long before the interviews for this study were conducted.

When Community Fire Safe groups were discussed during interviews some people thought that the program sounded like a good idea and expressed interest in attending a Community Fire Safe group meeting. Several people expressed interest in the idea of setting up local telephone trees (which some people had heard of at the Community Briefings and are discussed in the next section). One person had expressed interest to the local CFS about being involved in a Community Fire Safe group. However, at the time of our interviews, this had not been followed up. This person was interested in the idea of establishing a telephone tree and acknowledged that he could have been more active; however he felt that it was important that this be done under the guidance of the CFS.

> …It [the telephone tree] seemed to have a lot of merit behind it and I guess I could have been a bit more proactive. I'd probably go along and offer support to putting that sort of thing together but I don't know enough about the terrain or locality, certainly nothing alongside what any of the local CFS guys would know. And if they can just get a map of the area and say well, we reckon there's an area there, and just draw around it with a texta, and another one, and if there has to be 6 or 16 groups, then it's a matter of trying to find a person in each of those groups, whether they are CFS or not doesn't matter. Preferably not CFS, cause if there's a crisis they won't be home.

Another interviewee said she would like to have professional advice of the safest place to shelter in the house in the event of a fire. This content is usually covered in the Community Fire Safe meeting.

> I would like to see more of the Community Fire Safe groups, I'd like to see it organised by somebody else apart from the brigade because they've got enough on their plate.

One interviewee qualified his interest in education meetings with the following comment:

> People tend not to listen to somebody from the government, whereas somebody from the community has got local knowledge.'

The Community Fire Safe group which was experienced by participants in this research had involved the local captain as part of the presentation to the public. This may have addressed the concern of this resident who thought someone with 'local knowledge' would be better received. That both approaches ('local' and 'specialised') can be accommodated within the Community Fire Safe group structure and processes is an advantage.

### Summary: Community Fire Safe Group Meetings

- Only a few interviewees had experienced the program called "Community Fire Safe", although some others remembered hearing about it when mentioned by us.
- The interviewees who had experienced the program "Community Fire Safe" did find the program useful and reported learning new things about how to improve their level of preparedness.
- The person who had hosted a meeting identified gaps in his knowledge which prompted him to seek further information and attend other community information events run by the CFS.
- Having local representation available to a Community Fire Safe group meeting such as a member of the Local Brigade was also considered useful and desirable.
- Brigade support in organizing the infrastructure for Community Fire Safe meetings was raised as problematic by one interviewee. While a follow up Community Fire Safe meeting had originally been discussed, this did not occur, and the reasons for the lack of follow up were unknown to the interviewees.
- There was also an expressed interest in setting up a phone tree but in the absence of facilitation this was not followed up. Some other interviewees indicated an interest when the idea was broadly outlined by us, particularly having professional advice of the safest place to shelter during a fire event.

## Community Education Meetings: Preparedness Meetings

As noted above, of the sample of 18 interviews, 6 people recalled attending meetings about preparing for bushfires prior to the Mt Bold fires. These were in addition to those 2 households who specifically recalled the "Community Fire Safe" who have already been discussed above.

One of the preparedness meetings was attended by a household member while visiting a family member in a fire prone area of another State. Two households had attended a local Forum held prior to the Council elections where a local Brigade captain spoke about bushfire preparedness and the Community Fire Safe program. Another resident who had not attended this Forum had received a newsletter that reported on the Forum, including the bushfire preparedness information. Information on preparedness meetings were not specifically recorded in 4 of the interviews.

Ten households had not attended meetings that were specifically about bushfire preparedness prior to the Mt Bold fire, but one had attended such a meeting after the fire.

Of the 6 interviewees who recalled that they had attended a meeting about preparing for bushfire prior to the Mt Bold Fires, one person reported that the preparedness meeting she attended was generally useful and sensitised her to the need to be better prepared. The meeting provided an opportunity to ask specific questions related to individual circumstances. She commented:

> I became more sensitive to being better prepared [in terms of] hazard reduction, decision making around staying or going, having an actual plan, thinking about the order of doing things …On a hot day I think well, I should make sure I've got a full can of petrol there and the pump full, that sort of thing….having documents ready or securely stored.

One person who had attended a Community Fire Safe meeting recognised that he needed to learn more and subsequently attended other meetings. He recalled one such subsequent meeting.

> …It was far more structured (than the Community Fire Safe meeting) and quite a few people turned up. It was like a course if you like, 2 or 3 hour structured training course where you had 3 or 4 different sessions and you rotated between them. One was on equipment, one was on your choices, one was on fuel load and planning…By that stage I knew 50% of the picture of what they were trying to say, but just filling in the gaps, it was very useful for that …There was another session on the plan and they had you start the drafting of a plan. It was basically to focus on stay or go and make that choice …That was more of a question and answer session I guess. There was a short talk…There was quite a large turn out for that one. They presented for a while and then invited questions and quite a number of questions came up, some of them were focussed on the ability of communications (warnings)

The following account contains information generated through the participant attending meetings after the fire, but it is documented here, for the insight it provides to the connections between post fire programs and their role in future preparedness. This particular householder reflected that

to her, the value of meetings was related not only to the educative content, but also to their role in bringing people together.

> I think there were 2 parts to the meetings…One was the knowledge and information, and one was just a community feel, being part of the community and knowing that there are other people around you … That was a bit that I undervalued, and after the fire I realised the most important source of information I had were my neighbours, and I didn't have mobile phone numbers for some of them, I had landlines. So that was another thing that in a bushfire plan, I should have had those telephone numbers.

Another person who had attended a community education meeting after the fire felt that attending the meeting deepened his understanding of what was involved in bushfire preparedness. He reflected on the importance of attending meetings and speculated on why some people may not attend:

> I have great difficulty in understanding how people can gain this proper appreciation unless they do attend something like this…Somehow people have got to get to find out more of what you should have and at times the only cure of that is to progressively get more people to become involved in attending these sorts of information sessions. Possibly because they think they know it all; that's why they don't come.

One exceptionally well prepared household had attended at least one community meeting. This household showed us the extensive property (house) and household protection work that they had carried out. A lot of discussion ensued before the taping commenced, so our reporting is unfortunately less clear on the sources of influence on this extensive preparation. However we know that this household was asked to talk to a meeting of other community members to share information with them on the preparation they had carried out.

The fact that this family's expertise was recognised and elicited in this way points to the difficulty of adequately categorising meetings, as we cannot assume in every case that attendance at meetings is for the purpose of education of the community member. That is to say, we cannot assume a unidirectional information flow from 'educator' to 'community member.' As in this case, it may be that attendance of the community member at a meeting is to share what they know with others in the community.

This family was seen as a resource, rather than solely a 'recipient' of fire awareness information. The home was a new property and had been built to minimise bushfire risks. Features included, but were not limited to, a fire proof cellar external to the house, closed eaves, a built in ladder that could be pulled down to allow ready access to the roof, a system that would flood gutters quickly by backfilling from the tank, fire fighting pumps and an external sprinkler system. What was most noteworthy, other than the extensive preparation, was the degree of family interaction in developing and documenting the plan. The fire planning and action documentation was pulled together by the young adult daughter of the household. This family planned to defend the property. They had also prepacked valuable items such as photographs and legal documents to store in the cellar. We discuss this household again in 'other sources of influence' below.

Those who had attended preparedness meetings often reported that these meetings are not well attended. Several people could not remember

hearing about these meetings and one person pointed out that flyers advertising impending meetings are not distributed to those without letter boxes, thereby reducing information dissemination. Several of those who had either attended or been to a preparedness meeting reported that they found out about the meeting from a flyer in their letterbox.

Some people reported they would have attended had they known about the meetings or had not had prior commitments.

### Summary: Preparedness Meetings

- Those who attended fire awareness events reported they found them useful
- In several cases people reported both having what they knew affirmed and also gaps in their knowledge and preparedness highlighted, including the importance of having neighbours mobile and landline telephone numbers
- One household was asked to attend a meeting to share their knowledge with other community members, suggesting we need data categories which allow for sharing information laterally (or horizontally) at the community level, as well as the usual model of education coming from the specialist provider to the community member
- Our interviewees reported that meetings were not well attended and queried the extent of advertising of the meeting, though those who had attended reported receiving a flyer in their letter box.
- Those without letter boxes do not receive flyers distributed through the Post Office.

## Community Briefings during or soon after the fire

The Community meetings held during or soon after the Mt Bold fire (called here Community Briefings) was the meeting type most attended by interviewees. Ten of the 18 households interviewed had attended a community briefing meeting, 7 had not attended a briefing, and the matter was either not discussed or not recorded during one interview.

It was difficult for us always to be sure, when discussing ‘community briefing’ meetings, which briefing meetings were the subject of interviewees’ comments. One briefing meeting was convened solely by the Community Education staff and two by Community Education staff in conjunction with Head Office and Regional Office staff. Another meeting appeared to have been convened by one of the brigades. One meeting (a Bushfire Blitz meeting) had been scheduled before the fire, for a date which turned out to be during the fire event. The meeting went ahead, but with an altered content and emphasis, given the intervention of the fire event.

So in this brief description there were possibly four different meeting subtypes of the general type called “community briefings”. Also, it is difficult for people to recall exactly when they attended meetings during or soon after the fire. All these reasons made it difficult in all cases to pin down the meeting type under discussion. Sometimes in giving the account facts emerged which clarified which meeting was being discussed, such as those accounts where the presence of the Chief Fire Officer is noted. This locates the meeting as being that convened by Community Education and Regional and Head Office held at Kangarilla. The meeting convened by Community Education staff only was held at Echunga.

The variation in meeting types is probably relevant to the fact that we found that views about the meetings seem to be quite polarised. Some thought the meetings were extremely useful while others had quite negative views about what occurred at the meeting. In addition, the meetings were a time of considerably heightened emotion and fatigue, which would create perhaps a unique or particular dynamic. One participant provides insight into how some community members used the meeting he attended.

> I didn't feel that anybody was particularly angry, but they were obviously anxious because they had been stretched, but then they'd hear someone else's plight and they think, we're not as badly off as them.

Other interviewee feedback suggested the meetings provided a vehicle to express anger and distress, an opportunity for self assessment, and the opportunity to express gratitude to the fire service.

One clear purpose people had in attending the meetings was to look for information about what was happening with the fire:

> We went to the initial one purely because we still didn't know what was really happening 'cause we could still see smoke … it was still burning…and it was still clearly, sort of looked out of control.

Another participant observed that community members were

> asking lots of questions and I imagine that's something that the CFS would have got a lot of value from, or the local CFS from these local people. Some expectations were a bit tall I think, of individuals …They were unrealistic. They couldn't expect the CFS to do all these new things.

A key issue raised at the meetings was the siren.

> And they wanted to know why they don't ring the siren…That was the only criticism, that they never knew there was a fire; most of them never knew there was a fire until it hit them.

Another interviewee understood that the decision to sound the siren was a decision which could be made locally by the local brigade.

Interviewees also raised their concerns about the delay in the ABC broadcasting the fire alerts.

> At the meeting the next day at Kangarilla everyone was up in arms about that, 'cause we all depend on the ABC and the ABC just got so nicely out of that.

For others, the chance to express gratitude was a motivating factor in attending the briefing. A couple advised us that in their view, the vast majority of people attending "couldn't praise the CFS enough" on the way the fire was handled. One interviewee noted that his impression was "that most of the public went to thank the CFS". Another noted that those who attended who had had

> property at risk and they gave their experiences and they only had good things to say about the local CFS, and then all the teams that came from everywhere else.

Another woman noted:

> I spoke …that night and said, I'm pretty emotional about this, but I want to make sure that every person in the CFS knows that I thought they were brilliant.

People also recalled (approvingly) that senior CFS staff from Head Office had attended.

Some were quite concerned about the CFS being criticised by some members of the public. Some were happy to hear criticism if it was properly given and taken:

> When I went to that meeting and I think it was about a week later, I was very keen not to have them criticised for the sake of criticising – if it was constructive, perhaps we saw this happen and perhaps next time we could be a bit more whatever – fine, that was part of the meeting. And again, I thought that was really a great thing…And I went and my neighbours both sides went along, just about everybody along here went to the meeting.

Some commented on the fact that the CFS were left too exposed by the meetings. One expressed it this way, that it was

> … more or less let's stick the boot into the CFS. I felt it was really inappropriate, after they had done all that they'd done … Quite a few people got really angry about what the other people were saying about the CFS and it was just uncalled for.

This perspective was backed up another resident who hadn't attended but had spoken to a neighbour on her way home from the meeting:

> …. She said, we left in disgust…. There were other residents who weren't hit by the fire who were criticising the CFS. She said she wasn't staying to listen to that; she'd said her bit that she was disgusted with those people who were doing that and left.

One couple recalled that at the meeting they attended, the authorities present included Local Government, Police, Primary Industries and CFS personnel. They were given a Police report to fill out at the meeting, as the fire was thought to have been deliberately lit, making people who had experienced losses "victims of crime". This family also recalled that they were given information about recovery efforts, about how to get dead animals removed, and that counselling was being offered.

The fact that the meetings brought the community together at a stressful time was identified as being important in its own right, aside from the content of the meetings.

> It was a tremendous idea that meeting, to get all the people in the community who have or have not been affected, because anyone on that side of town wouldn't have been affected by the direct fire, but they would have been affected through stress and that sort of thing. So it brought all the community, people who wouldn't normally go to the meeting. It's the most we've ever seen at any meeting. - a tremendous idea.

> I don't think it was grossly over-enlightening but it was certainly good to get together on the subject. That's what you get out of it. …..solidarity and a community feeling…The fact that everyone else was absolutely pissed off with the ABC, that made me feel better.

The meetings were often reported as being very well run and the presentation of maps showing where the fire was, and where it had travelled, was appreciated. One person remembered the CFS demonstrating the information available on the CFS website which showed where the fire was and which direction it was taking. Handouts that were pertinent to the local situation were also valued. Another person thought that it was very good that the possible psychological impact was discussed at such a meeting.

One interviewee appreciated advice about the importance of having the telephone numbers and RAPID numbers (a property identification number) of neighbours. Another reported that since the meeting:

> I think more about connection with the neighbours, immediate neighbours.

Several people commented on, and were impressed by the willingness of the CFS to listen to criticism.

> [ A reason for the meeting] was to gain some feedback there and then while it was fresh in people's mind as to what happened. And the other part of it was a bit of a gripe session from the public about communication, the fact that there were no radio warnings until well over an hour… those sort of things, and the CFS wanted to know, they accepted even fairly pointed criticism constructively.
>
> I think they (CFS) took a bit of a chance with it still being a fairly emotional time. People were away from their home, still with a risk of having some danger to the homes. Our danger was largely past, apart from a few spot fires, but for other people it was still pretty real and I think they did take a little bit of a chance that some of the responses might be sort of clouded and there were a lot of people there… I'm sure they got a lot of information. They did end up having to make some commitments that they perhaps ought not to have been forced into with regard to …we will do this and we will do that.

Many appreciated the fact that senior CFS staff attended and that the CFS had been open about what could have been done better

> There was another guy, I'd know his name if you said it but he's in charge of this, the hills sort of area and he was good, he was very, very good.…To hear what Euan said, I believed everything he said, and the other guy whose name I can't think of, it was really good to know that two men like that are in charge and it's not.… sometimes you read in the paper about the bunglings of CFS and so on. It was really good to know that these two guys were in charge and this is what they said and they admitted things that could have been done better, that was really good.

One person spoke about the issue of an evacuation centre being raised at a meeting and the confusion that some people seemed to have about advice to either stay or go early.

> …I don't think people really understand it. People still are talking about an evacuation centre, that was the other thing that came up at that meeting, where is the evacuation centre. And it had to be pointed out that there is no such thing in CFS policy as an evacuation centre. In the case of a fire, you go where you have to go to, where you feel safe to go to and possibly the Kangarilla oval is

> a safe place to go to because that's right next to the fire station. But it's not an evacuation centre, because CFS policy doesn't say evacuate, cause that's counter productive, that's dangerous. People think, I'll plan to stay, but I've been told to evacuate..and then they run straight into the fire. I think you'll find if you talk to people higher up in the CFS that there is no such thing as an evacuation policy.

Another interviewee had criticisms around the deployment of resources and raised questions about why particular crews did not attend certain areas, and why the water bombers selected particular areas and not others to water bomb. She felt the answers she got were 'answers like a lawyer would give you'.

One person thought that providing information about how to prepare and respond to a fire wasn't useful at the time as the fire had already passed through the area. We think that this comment may relate to the meeting which was initially scheduled prior to the fire as a "Bushfire Blitz" meeting, but which changed its direction during the course of the meeting due to the fire event. In contrast, another person reported that it had been useful that information about how to respond to a fire was provided, for future reference, even though a fire event had actually occurred.

Two households had not found the briefing meetings particularly helpful. One person whose spouse had attended the briefing meeting felt that the meeting had reassured people that agencies were putting a lot of effort into containing the fire, which may have been comforting for some. This person felt that, as he had understood that no new information had been provided, the reassurance had not been personally useful to him. He reported that his wife was unable to be clear on what she had learnt, and in his opinion her attending the meeting had been a waste of (her) 2 hours.

Two people reported choosing not to attend as the fire was still burning and both felt that remaining at home would be the best decision because of potential danger to the property.

One person who could not attend a meeting would have liked to have raised the issue of the need for better communication so that people planning to leave could do so safely, knowing which way to go and being able to leave early enough.

> …How do you know, they don't know half the time, but it's the communication, 'cause people do need time to prepare in a sense just to leave, and I think that's where people get caught because they don't leave early enough, especially towing a horse float and which way to go.

One household would have attended a briefing meeting had its members known that it was occurring and were disappointed that they had not been informed about the meeting. Others reported hearing the briefing meetings advertised on the radio and seeing a notice at the general store.

In some cases people's expectations of how either the CFS or the community would respond lead them to decide not to attend.

> …They [referring to community members] get hysterical and I can't be bothered with that. Some of the people around here go on and on and on about minor things. I get irritated with that.

One woman's views have been mentioned above in the overview of reasons people reported not wanting to attend meetings. She said specifically about meetings after the fire, that she had had a negative experience at a community meeting following the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983.

Two families who had not attended a briefing had heard negative feedback from people who had attended. One family was informed by neighbours who had attended that the briefing meeting had been 'all self congratulatory hero stuff',and that these neighbours had walked out during the meeting. Another person who had not attended reported that people she knew had walked out of a meeting because 'it was all a whitewash of the CFS effort'. Again, given the difficulty of locating each meeting type, we cannot say if this referred to a formally convened community briefing or not.

We reserve the last word for one of the most reflective interviewees, who argued that while imparting information in meetings during the fire event may be a bit late, it is better than not doing it.

> There needs to be a message and the information just steady… drip, drip feed….when fires do occur people will be more accepting of that sort of information and hey, it may prove to be a little late for some, but it's going to be the only means of some people gaining an understanding.

### Summary: Community Briefings during or soon after the fire

- While it was difficult for us to establish confidently which meetings were under discussion during the interviews, we can say that Community Briefing Meetings held during the fire were important to the community for:
    - the informative content
    - bringing the community together
    - serving as an emotional support
    - providing a vehicle for the community to express their concerns or gratitude about the way the fire was managed
- Some interviewees were concerned with what they saw as unnecessary criticism
- It was important for some to see senior CFS figures present and also to observe them accepting criticism
- Over half the interviewees attended a briefing meeting; for a small number, the fact that the fire was still active was a deterrent.
- Some were not aware that the meetings were being held. In most instances people would have attended these meetings if they had been able.
- A smaller number of residents also felt that these meetings were a waste of time, although these reports were sometimes second hand, that is, from interviewees reporting the response of other residents and their neighbours.

## Pre – event Media campaigns and publicity materials awareness

### Introduction

Bushfire preparedness information recalled by interviewees came from a variety of sources. Some could recall messages from a particular publication, but many people could not recall the sources of specific information.

People recalled information from television, radio and/or newspapers, both advertisements and general media coverage about bushfire preparedness or bushfires as they were occurring. Some people remembered specific CFS campaigns. People recalled receiving CFS publications delivered through the post, being given written information at CFS initiated meetings and information sessions, picking up or reading publications at the general store and receiving publications from the local council. One person had found brochures at the library.

In some cases, publications or media coverage prompted people to seek further information from the CFS website which was described as useful and easily accessible. Use of the website was reported by both younger (20s)

and older people (60s) and by people new to the area as well as those who had been local residents for decades.

One family who were new to the area recalled a brochure and poster that had been left for them by the previous owner of their property.

## Specific CFS initiatives

We will set out the interviewees' responses to different means of publication under the following headings:

- Printed Publications
- Campaigns
- Media
- Website
- Hotline

However, we recognise that these categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a 'campaign' such as the Pencil and Paper campaign, includes a publication which is recognisable as a more general document of encouraging people to make a plan, which forms one of the more general publications.

## Printed Publications

Printed information is available in pamphlets and brochures under the slogan 'Bushfire Ready' with information pertaining to, Living through a bushfire, Preparing for bushfires, Bushfire restrictions, Protection your family, farm and animals [18].

For some people the brochures served to assist in the discussion of a bushfire plan.

> We had one of the pamphlets when we sat down and talked about what our bushfire plan was.

This interviewee however, also reported that her husband had been the one who took up the family role of doing bushfire preparedness, and had attended a preparedness meeting or meetings, so for them as a household, the brochure she mentions was not the only intervention.

For some, the printed material served as reminders. The fact that, in the sequence of this conversation, this person also added that the 'radio one' is good too, might suggest some mental association with a stream of messages.

> We get flyers through the mail …I think it just pricks everybody's memories and just gets them to think about it. I think the radio one is really good too.

One interviewee (who had not been to any meetings) commented on the approach to planning set out in the brochures.

> I think the brochures are actually quite good in that they take you through a coherent and logical decision making process, to stay or to leave and not to leave at the last minute. So I think it's quite a good process, but the thing is getting people to actually do it.

[18] A new publication is in this 2008 fire season

Checklists of preparations to be carried out prior to the fire season were generally considered helpful. Even those who had high levels of preparedness also thought that the checklist was a useful prompt.

> … It's a good prompt…, I'm always surprised when I read things like that thinking, hey, I forgot about that.

One person was able to quickly find a CFS publication from at least 10 years ago that had a preparedness checklist, which had been found to be useful.

## Critique of publications

While the step by step process in some publications as one means of guiding people to a decision about whether to stay or go in the event of a fire was reported as useful, a couple of people felt that some of the advice was too simplistic or dogmatic. For example, the advice about having a 20 metre clearing around the house was not possible for some people who planned to stay and defend their properties in the event of a fire. This person didn't want to remove trees and bushes that were relatively close to the house.

> A 20 metre clearance around a house? Well, we wouldn't have a tree in the whole of the Adelaide hills would we? You look at houses that are built in a built up area - there's not even 20 metres between a house. So you have to take a risk and say, I'm prepared to have the trees, I think I've planted sensibly, they aren't natives around the house, they are deciduous, because once again I'm trying to live a fairly sustainable life where I don't have air-conditioning, I don't have heating apart from the wood stove, so therefore you have to say, because I want to cut down on the usage of electricity, I need shade …from trees, then I need the sun, so you work out those sort of things.

This same resident expanded on how she uses the printed material, and then adapts the message according to her own circumstance. She spoke of it like this:

> I have got my bushfire plan which I intend to stay incidentally, and defend the home as well as I can. But because of my physical disabilities, I can't climb up on the roof, and the power goes off, so I can't get water, only by buckets, and I'm incapable probably of doing a lot, but I've got my plan.

She had decided that she would prepare her property and stay in the house until the fire front passed. But recognising her physical limitations, if she was unable to stop any spot fires and the house caught fire, she would walk with the dog into a burnt out paddock for safety, as the front would have passed by this time.

Other participants talked of how they mould the 'instructions' or advice on publications to their own circumstances. One wished the publications were

> a little bit more practical, to take into consideration all people, not just age, cause age really has nothing to do with disability or inability.

Others talked of how they made considered decisions in relation to the "trade-off" of reducing fuel loads and supporting local fauna. Others drew attention to the limitations on planning, emphasizing the need to assess the specific circumstances on the day when deciding what action to take.

> I agree that in theory that sounds very good but once again it all depends on where the fire comes from and what's happened on the day.

The complexity of making a bushfire action plan and then deciding what to do when a fire actually occurs is discussed further in a separate section in this report, as is the observation that different household members made different use of the available educative materials, such as the women who made extensive use of publications she downloaded from the web, while her husband found no use in these at all.

## Campaigns

Other resources that are utilised to engage the community are media campaigns. Two recent campaigns were most commonly referred to throughout our interviews. The two campaigns mentioned were the Pencil and Paper Campaign and the Sticker campaign.

06 – 07 Pencil and Paper Campaign, which included the slogan 'to survive a bushfire, your going to need one of these' referring to an enclosed pencil. The campaign included a bushfire action plan guide and a checklist of what is needed to be done.

07 – 08 Sticker Campaign 'Is your family bushfire ready'. The campaign includes a booklet with information on the decision to stay and defend or leave early and what this entails. There is also an accompanying sticker to put on a letter box, fence or gate to show that the property is well prepared and bushfire ready.

The most recent campaign, the Sticker campaign, had been posted to residents shortly before this research was conducted. Knowing that they were soon to be interviewed about bushfires, many people had a copy of the brochure at hand (although not all had read it in the few days since it had arrived).

For the few interviewees who had read the Sticker campaign material, they queried its purpose and significance. For these it seemed to create confusion and concern rather than motivation to prepare or talk to their neighbours. Some commented that they didn't have a letterbox, and one woman who did have a letter box said she would not 'deface it' with the sticker. One person while happy with the brochure provided felt that the sticker was just a public relations waste of money.

> ….Do you know what the sticker is about? …Do they act on the sticker?... What is the point of the sticker? …Do you only go into houses where the sticker is?

Several people recalled the brochure that had been distributed with a pencil to encourage people to develop a written bushfire action plan. Some people had kept this brochure.

Another household commented that they were aware that the Tasmanian Fire Service uses a sticker to denote 'undefendable' properties, whereas the CFS sticker was to convey the opposite message. We didn't ask if there was an implicit criticism here of the conflicting nature of key messages if one took a nationwide perspective on community awareness efforts.

## Media, including newspapers and radio

Several people commented on the importance of having information on the radio, either as an 'advertisement' or as part of the content of a program.

> What the CFS do at the moment ….. There's messages on TV and radio I think are great. They need to continue doing that because even if it doesn't have an impact until you've been through it, you are at least aware that you're in a bushfire zone.
>
> I guess the more people hear and see those things the more aware they'll become, or the more they'll take in.

Information in the general media and having trusted people deliver information were identified as important.

> …The Advertiser was good….Every year the Advertiser says this is going to be the worst fire season and this is what you should do and this is what you shouldn't do, so there is a lot of information around which is very good ….The ABC will interview … Euan Ferguson, and I always listen to it and take on board what he says, so there's a lot of information around.

### Website

Two households reporting using the CFS website as a source of information before the Mt Bold fire. While we did not ask specifically, we conclude from the context of the interviews that what was downloaded from the website were the information brochures. One referred specifically to a 'checklist' she got from the CFS website.

### Barriers to Dissemination of publicity materials

Some people tended to listen to only ABC radio while others listened to commercial stations. Some people commented on articles in the Advertiser while others referred to the local paper, however there are some supply issues with the local paper, and some not reading a daily newspaper.

One person avoided advertisements on television by pre-recording programs to the hard-drive of a set top box and then skipping through the advertisements without watching them. A couple of people reported that they had not received CFS publications and one person said that publications that came through the mail were likely to be treated as another piece of junk mail.

New ownership brought reduced hours of opening at the general store, resulting in some people taking their post office boxes to another town. In addition the new owner is reported as circulating less community information than the previous owner.

We have already referred to people being 'time poor' as one barrier to receipt of information.

### Summary: Media Campaigns and publicity materials (pre event)

- Most interviewees had some familiarity with or were aware of publications, campaigns, media; such as newspapers or radio
- Fewer were aware of websites and the CFS hotline
- People mostly felt that publications and some materials such as the Pencil and Paper campaign were useful as these products provide a source of information that can act as a prompt or reminder
- Some interviewees had criticism with aspects of the fire safety material suggesting that it was too simplistic or dogmatic
- The Sticker campaign raised questions and confusion about the purpose and useability of the sticker
- Generally people didn't mind that they were receiving information that they already knew and reported finding it a 'confirmation' of their current understanding
- Having multiple sources of information was seen as positive, as at a minimum they raised awareness of the risk of a bushfire
- Repeating information was also considered important
- Several people had kept information for considerable periods of time (for example, 10 years) as a guide that they could refer back to
- People use a wide range of commercial and non commercial media sites
- Dissemination of materials is dependent of other factors also such as the disposition of the General Store owners.

## Bushfire Information and Warning Messages: during an event.

Here we will discuss the formal means of communication, and therefore exclude from comment those who had more direct (local) forms of communication, such as CFS volunteers who had pagers, received alerts in this way, and passed on information to other members of the public. We also exclude the use of media such as weather reports from which some members of the public could deduce risk information. We concentrate therefore here on official reports including information from the radio, websites, and the CFS hotline.

### Radio

Most people were aware that the ABC was a formal provider of bushfire information. Thirteen households reported obtaining information from the radio. Six of these 13 households found the information they obtained to be useful. We have used only a sample of comments from our interviewees to demonstrate the way information was obtained from the ABC radio.

> …It was telling us every 15 minutes, it would come on with the warning sounds and then tell you about the status of the bushfire… I think the radio is as up to date as anything; it's good.

> The ABC is the one for a fire; they tell you which roads have been blocked off and where it's travelling to. …Every 15 minutes they tell you where it's going… it was good I think; there is plenty of info out there.

One woman, travelling with her daughter and her mother when the fire broke out, spoke of the benefit to her of the radio information, but she needed to weigh this up against the fact that having the radio on was distressing for her daughter.

> …Do I turn it off so that (daughter) isn't really getting worried here, or do I keep it going ?... I said to her, we need to keep it going so that we are kept up to date and I know it's really worrying and she was in tears for some of that, so mum was trying to reassure her.

Critique of radio broadcasts

However, 7 of the 13 households reported that the information broadcast on the radio was out of date. Typical of these sentiments were the following three statements from three different households.

> … There was information constantly being given on the radio about status, which was far too out of date, it wasn't being constantly updated – or if it was being updated by CFS the radio stations weren't running it.

> Some information that was coming over the radio was very old. They were giving advice about the fire going in a particular direction and I reckon, I'm a bit hazy now, but I would suggest that at least 20 minutes after the wind change had come, they were still giving the old information.

> I was driving from my property, forward towards the fire to get to a vantage point so that I could see what was happening. What I could see was happening was the information that was coming over the TV and radio was lagging by at least an hour.

Others expressed frustration that for the first two hours the cricket was not interrupted to provide fire information.

> I had the wireless on because we are told to listen to the wireless. I listened to it for over an hour watching the smoke and not one report, the cricket was on, not one report about the fire… So not being a cricket fan I lost the temper and thought the bloody cricket's more important, we don't know what's going on. Then I tried to ring the CFS and of course you just got a recorded message, so I rang the police and asked them if they could give me an update on what on earth was going on. So a very nice lady went away and came back and said oh yes, it is known that there is a fire and the CFS are attending. I said I know that - I've been watching it now for 2 hours.

> Well you would expect the bloody ABC to tell you 'cause they are the official fire radio station and if you have a fire you lose your telephone line, you lose your telly, you depend on your battery radio. And they were broadcasting cricket from Sydney.

> It just so happens that my CDMA, which Telstra is going to kill in January, will get text, but up until then we've never been able to use a digital phone here. So what the hell do we do if we don't have our fire radio station? And I guess that was the angriest thing and still all these

> months later, I'm still really angry. If I ever see Matt and Dave[19] I'm going to really get stuck into them, but they glossed over that. They said, oh yes, but the ABC was right here and we did a great job. No they weren't, they were not there. It was an hour after the fire started.

One person used the radio to monitor weather reports for information about wind changes:

> The main thing is that you keep a listen to the weather reports … we realised that the change was coming in so that there was going to be a swing with the wind and it was going to blow in the opposite direction to our place so it was only a matter of waiting until that change came in before we were quite safe.

## Websites

Here we comment on the use of the CFS website. Two other websites were mentioned, and are discussed under 'Influences' below, where we refer to these websites as 'influences of specialised knowledge'.

<u>During the fire</u>

One person had accessed information from the CFS website during the fire and reported that the website provided up to date information that was pinpoint accurate.

> …The emails, they tell you exactly where they are, north east and approaching this road. I don't know if you've ever seen them, but they flick through all the time. They were really smack on and within minutes.

<u>After the fire</u>

Two people discovered the CFS website after the Mt Bold fires and would use it to get information in the future. One of these people had learnt about the CFS website during a community briefing meeting after the fire. He reported:

> They had a great website …You could go into it and actually see where the fire was and it had it at 6.08, the fire was reported (or whatever time it was) and then it showed where it flared out from there, 6.20 it was here, 7.00 it was there, 8.00 it was there and they showed it … right through the whole of the area. You could see exactly where it was so you could see what direction it was sort of taking.

Another person who discovered the CFS website after the Mt Bold fire rarely watches the news or listens to the radio. The CFS website is now bookmarked in 'Favourites' so that it's easy to access:

> …I thought I'd go onto the CFS website and see if there's anything on there and that was when I realised that they have updates all the time about fires around the place …So I found that quite interesting and different things on there that they explain and go into ...If I'm in the office I'll just whiz onto there and you can get an update and read the media releases about fires, where and when, and that sort of thing ..I find it interesting to read and know.

## CFS hotline

Two people rang the CFS hotline during the event. For one household, their property was close to where the fire started and the hotline had only just

[19] Reference to 'Matt and Dave in the Morning' from ABC Radio, Adelaide.

received a report of a fire on a specific road and had limited information available:

> I asked, do you know which way it's heading and the girl said not at the moment, but it's fairly windy. We live …on the next road over. She said I think you should go and put your fire plan into action. I'll let you go.

The other person who called the hotline was the person who was driving home from interstate when she realised, due to reports on Radio National, that her property was in the line of the fire. She rang seeking more detailed information which was not able to be provided. However she was informed that she could not return home:

> I wanted specific detail which was unreasonable for me to ask for…When I rang the Hotline basically she said, you won't be able to go home. She said, I'm not saying there's no home to go to, it's that the roads have been cut off; the CFS and police are not letting anybody through, it's too dangerous, you won't be able to go home. She wasn't exactly sure where [… ] Road was but from my description of where it was she said no.

One interviewee who was very anxious that she would not hear about a fire in enough time to get home from the city to assist her school age children and animals, was relieved to learn from a brochure of the existence of the hotline. Our understanding is that she learnt about this after the fire.

> …The CFS hotline that you can ring… I found out from a recent brochure. That's fantastic. It's a number that at least I could call if I was at work and heard on the radio that there is a fire in this general area. Hopefully they would have the information.

## Other formal warning methods

We learnt at interview that the issue of the use of the siren as a warning device was intensely debated at the Community Briefings after the fire. We assume there would be documentation on this issue within the CFS. Also, it is outside the scope of our research to inquire further into this contention about the siren. It is interesting to note however, that according to the understanding of one of our interviewees, the CFS did agree that the siren would be sounded in the future, being a decision each local brigade can make. We were told that the siren used to be sounded, but it was sounded for every event, including Motor Vehicle Accidents, and complaints about this from the community brought that practice to an end. This is an interesting issue of community/brigade relations[20].

[20] There has been a siren trial in the Mitcham Hills during the 2009 fire season. sirenhttp://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/community_information/mitcham_hills_bushfire_siren_trial.jsp; accessed 5th May 2009. While we do not know the results of this trial, it is interesting to note that the partners in the trial included the Blackwood and Belair District Community Association and the Blackwood South Neighbourhood Watch.

### Summary: Bushfire Information and Warning Messages (during an event)

- Interviewees were aware that the ABC was the formal carrier of fire information
- Slightly more people found the radio messages and warnings out of date and not useful, than found them timely and useful
- Several residents expressed concern about the cricket coverage taking precedence over the fire report and in one case, anger about this had visibly persisted for the ten intervening months between the fire and the interviews
- Only a small number of residents know of the CFS website and the CFS Hotline as a source of information during a fire, but those that used these resources found them useful
- Interviewees reported concern that the siren was not used to alert people to the fire; the use of a fire siren remains a contested issue.

## Household, Neighbourhood and Community/Agency level influences

This next section sets out results of influences on household members' responses which were in addition to (or which existed alongside and interacted with) those influences of formal CFS programs as discussed. Before outlining these influences, there are two key issues which are relevant to all the influences we specify and we would like to document them first. We see these two issues as pertaining directly to the context in which this research took place. One we have called 'community infrastructure' and the other the 'passage of the fire'.

### Context: Community Infrastructure

By 'Community infrastructure' here we refer to the community infrastructure which predated the fire, such as community newspapers, and community mechanisms for information transfer.

Although services and organisations are an integral link to support and protect communities, it is clear in our interviews that communities also have local networks of communication and support which provide and create strengths and resources that can be utilised to promote self sufficiency. These resources are often quietly present in communities but we suggest that their significance is probably undervalued. More importantly, a lack of resource within the fire service as currently structured, mitigates against recognition of these resources and how they could be better utilized to increase fire safety. The resources that were identified in our interviews consisted of:

- the post office
- key people within the community
- education officers and
- existing networks.

General store / Post Office

One interviewee mentioned that most of their information about what is happening in their local area had in the past been received by the general store which also functioned as a local Post Office. There is a notice board at the store, and there was a community newsletter that used to be distributed.

> We used to get little things put in our letterbox all about what's happening in the community

Another interviewee who also agreed that the local post office/general store had been a community hub, that the present incumbent in the post office role is managing it with little support and had narrowed its opening hours. In the time that we were in the district, she had further reduced the opening hours This has had some reported effects of reduced information flow, and some community members reported having moved post offices for the collection of their mail, thus further limiting the capacity of this resource as a community hub.

Key Businesses / People

In addition to the Post Office being considered a 'hub' of the community, it became apparent during our interviews that people within the community also have the potential to be key instigators in forming and maintaining community support, groups and networks. While our experience in the district was limited, there was one person who was well known as convening a group (or a process) called the Community Forum. This Forum also has a newsletter, a copy of which we were shown. In addition she has formed a network within her immediate area.

> [Name] has organised group meetings of people; she gets the residents together, she's got what she calls a phone tree. They've got each others phone numbers, if anything happens they can talk to each other, warn each other, help each other.

Another key resource was a local brigade captain and his wife, who ran a local business. Several interviewees recounted while transacting business, they would engage in conversations with the captain about fire safety issues.

Services to manage increasing population

While speaking of an area closer to the city, one resident questioned whether fire services could adequately respond to the urban developments at the fringes of the city. He felt the increasing population was creating a dangerous situation

> particularly if it's not being serviced by the Metropolitan Fire Service and they don't open new fire stations to keep up with it, which comes back to infrastructure

He was also concerned about what he saw to be inadequate planning at the local government level in relation to fire safety. He felt this contributed to distrust and scepticism of local government.

## Context: Passage of the fire

One key contextual factor impacting on the household decision making, was the location of their home in relation to the passage of the fire.

As we need to maintain confidentiality of the interviewees, we cannot identify the residences in relation to the fire path, so we can only comment on this issue in general terms. The key issue was the time residents had between the point

of ignition and the fire threatening individual and family lives and homes. The fire was believed to have been lit by an arsonist at around 6pm. The fire itself then travelled at an average of 6 km's per hour. It also developed on two fronts, and these fronts joined together at a particular time in the evening [21].

Four of our interviewees discussed how the passage of fire influenced their ability to respond to the threat. Two of these 4 cases discussed how having limited time to respond to the fire impacted them personally. The remaining two cases in this cluster of four also demonstrated an awareness in general of how rapidly fire acts and how little time there can be to respond.

One family we interviewed reported that their property was impacted within minutes of them first becoming aware of the fire. This household had gone to great lengths to ensure they had a well thought out plan and appropriate fire protection equipment. What they couldn't plan for was not having the time to implement their plan. They lost a lot of their stock. They reflected:

> We had a plan for the animals, but just didn't have time. It depends; you really need a multi-staged plan, like how many people were home, and which way it's coming from, and if you have got this much warning you are going to do this, and if you have got that much warning you can do this much more.

This household emphasised the speed of the fire in this way. One member recounted the conversation she had had with a neighbour, who reported that

> he was sitting on top of the hill, thinking, those poor buggers, and then all of a sudden he realised, shit, the wind's changed, and my paddocks are on fire, and our plan is to evacuate, let's get out of here".

The second case in this cluster reported that due to losing power they had no water. While they had a generator, they had left it too long to get this started, and would get this started earlier in a future fire event.

Of the remaining 2 cases, one household reflected that, after driving through the worst affected areas, they now realise how quickly a fire can devastate an area and how scary it really is. The final case in this cluster whose plan prior to the fire was to come home, gather up the animals and then leave, reflected that they had not put into perspective the quickness of a fire and in reality would not have the time to be able to carry out their plan to leave.

> The quickness, how fast everything happened, I really hadn't put that into reality and perspective. I thought I'd have time to do all that.

[21] This information was taken from the Mt Bold Field Trip on Thursday 4th September 2008, during a presentation given by the Incident Commander of the day. This Field Trip was taken after the AFAC Conference, Adelaide, 2008.

**Summary: Community Infrastructure and the passage of fire**

- Various 'intermediaries' assisted the processes of "Agency/Community Interaction"
- In this study these were particularly;
  - the General Store/Post Office
  - the local newspaper
  - an active local resident who convenes Forums and runs a Newsletter and
  - a local captain who is accessible to the public through his local business
- Community members used all of these means to access information
- In more recent times, and following a change of ownership of the General Store, reduced opening house has decreased residents' ability to use the store as a communication medium.
- Even with detailed planning, a key uncontrollable factor affecting household response capacity is the point of ignition of a fire, the rate and direction of spread.

## 2.3 Levels of Response: Influences

Next, in Table 8 below, we summarise what we think of as three 'levels' as a framework for discussing the data on response influences. After setting these out, we then discuss each of these three levels in the subsequent text.

**Table 8 Three levels of response influences: Individual, Neighbourhood and Community/Agency**

| Individual Household Level | Neighbourhood level | Community/Agency Level (including CFS levels of Central, Regional and Local Brigade level) |
|---|---|---|
| Beliefs, attitudes | Capacity for community to draw on and build networks around fire safety | Community interaction with the CFS (this is covered in the next section) |
| Life Stage and Life Choice Issues | | Organizational environments external to CFS – eg Local Government; Public Land and Water Management agencies |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Personal/family communication | | Influence of brigades |
| Awareness of the function of emotions | | |
| Impact of children | | |
| Impact of animals | | |
| Local or specialised knowledge | | |

## Individual Household Level

### Beliefs, attitudes

Table 9 below sets out what we see (broadly) as three beliefs or attitudes toward the threat of fire which influenced responses. Nine households (one case appeared in more than one category) expressed some attitude or belief that either did, or would, if relevant in a particular fire, influence their response. We have identified 3 main themes that were apparent to us in the data and have created categories A, B, and C, as represented below.

**Table 9 Beliefs/Attitudes**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | 'Laid back' about risk | 4 |
| B | Decisions about where to shelter. | 4 |
| C | The type of fire which would influence decision making | 2 |

Category A, a cluster of 4 cases, all expressed to us that they had been pretty 'laid back' about the risk of fire prior to the Mt Bold event. The first case in this cluster discussed how they did not take the threat of bushfire seriously until after the Mt Bold fire.

> [Husband] ……. was more serious about it than me. I think I just thought, I didn't think consciously that there was ever going to be a fire or just subconsciously I think it wouldn't happen to us. So I don't think I thought of it seriously.'

Since the bushfire experience, this woman is much more aware of, and has taken concrete action, in relation to the reality of bushfire. The 3 remaining cases in this cluster reported that bushfire was not a high priority in their minds. A man, speaking for himself and his wife, said that they acknowledged that they had, in their minds, minimised the risk of a fire threatening their property, despite having lived in the area for over 20 years.

> …I think we were pretty gung ho about the whole thing, a bit laid back about the risk….

In addition to being 'laid back', this man also commented that while the risk of fire was on his mind, it was 'a long way back' in his mind. The other 2 cases in this cluster also indicated similar beliefs or attitudes, that while bushfire was a concern, it was not at the forefront of their mind, as other lifestyle and more current factors dominated their thoughts.

Category B is a cluster of 4 cases. Two cases in particular made reference to the issue of where to shelter in or around home during a fire front. One

put this as a question to us as something they would like to understand better, and the other put this as a statement of belief. The woman raising the issue as a question, said that having someone to advise on the safest part of the house in which to shelter would make them feel more confident in using their house as a refuge.

> I would rather have a professional come in and say.., you know, have we done the right thing? ….., We've covered the house in water, the surrounding area is covered in water, would it be safe for us to stay in that area down stairs, where it's all concrete?

The second case of the first 2 told us that if worst came to worst, they planned to drive to the middle of a grazed paddock while the front passed.

> … Because you wouldn't have to worry about anything catching up afterwards; it would just be smouldering short grass and that would be it, and that's just going slow and you could drive through that. We've got diesels so we don't have to worry about petrol cars or anything like that, so if it came to that, then, I'd be comfortable to do that.

The other 2 cases in the cluster believed the vegetation, in particular the trees around their house, made their house an unsafe place to shelter in. In one household the trees and scrub near the house were the dominant reason for deciding the house was not the safest option for sheltering in and their best plan would be to leave. The second household were worried about the increased risk posed by the large trees near their house, but this had not led them to a decision to leave, but it was reported as something that increased their anxiety about sheltering in their home. They were constrained however about having the trees removed, due to the expense entailed.

Category C is a cluster of 2 cases that reported that the only circumstance which would trigger them to change from their plan to stay with the home was if the fire was a 'fire-storm'. Interestingly, these two comments were made by men with some experience of fire (one through farming and the other through a past involvement with a fire service) These men were the only interviewees to use the word 'fire-storm'.

### Summary: beliefs attitudes and circumstances

- Several interviewees did not attend to the possibility of fire as a possible threat prior to the Mt Bold fire; their attention has now become more conscious
- Some households were either unsure about the house being the safest haven:
    - One believed it would be better to try to drive to a grazed paddock in a car
    - One believed trees posed a problem to their home, leading one to decide that their best plan was to leave
    - One expressed anxiety about trees but was concerned about the cost of removing them
- Two men with past fire experience, believed that they would decide to leave the home in the event of a 'fire-storm'.

## Life stages and life choices

Here we outline a group of ideas we have loosely described as 'life stages and life choices,' relating to interviewees circumstances that influenced their responsiveness to fire. We have identified 4 themes that were apparent in the data and have created categories A, B, C and D as represented in the table below.

**Table 10 Life Stage and Life Choice**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | work and commitments | 8 |
| B | Age | 2 |
| C | Wants to be self sufficient | 1 |
| D | Absentee landholders | 1 |

Category A is a cluster of 8 cases that reported that busy work commitments would impact on their ability to engage in preparedness activities. One case in this cluster indicated that they did not feel they had time to look at pamphlets and other received media material. Information of this type would most likely end up in the 'junk mail' pile. The remaining 7 cases in this cluster reported having work commitments. Of these

- One indicated that attending to work commitments would usually have higher priority
- One was often away for extended periods of a time which made it difficult to attend meetings
- Five work significant distances away from the area in which they live.

Category B is a cluster of 2 households who reported that age influences their responsiveness. One of these two households indicated that they were not interested in attending meetings as they spent most of their working life attending meetings.

> You get to the stage where you really don't want to go to meetings. Both of us have spent a lot of our professional lives at meetings: been there, done that. [It] might suit other people who are younger. We are both in our seventies. Younger people can go to meetings and wear themselves out.

The second case in this cluster reported that as she now lived alone and was getting older, she felt ill-equipped to maintain the property and actively defend it in the event of a fire. She reported she was considering moving from the area.

Category C consists of one case (on whom we have already reported) who acknowledged that despite being aware of fire risk, her decision to plant trees near the house is based on a desire to be self sufficient. Her trees were deciduous exotics and accordingly may have been less fire-prone than natives, although this was not discussed.

This interviewee reported that

> I'm trying to live a fairly sustainable life where I don't have air-conditioning, I don't have heating apart from the wood stove, so therefore you have to say, because I want to cut down on the usage of electricity, I need shade, and I need shade from trees, then I need the sun, so you work out those sort of things.

Category D consists of one case of a report from one of our interviewees who lived next door to absentee landholders. The house was only occupied by the owners and then only intermittently. Accordingly the owners were less available for community safety planning activities than other residents.

### Summary: Life stages and life choices

- Several interviewees felt that barriers to household preparedness included either needing to give higher priority to work commitments or having to spend lengthy periods away from home due to work
- These factors:
  - decreased the possibility of getting to community meetings or events in relation to preparedness activities, and
  - impacted on the likelihood of one household member being away from home at the time of a fire
- Two people specifically cited age as a factor in effecting responsiveness
- In one case age was mentioned as a disincentive in attending evening and other community meetings
- In one case age was a factor affecting physical capacity to both respond and defend
- Some residents make considered choices about their lifestyle, and acknowledge that they are engaged in a 'tradeoff' – between for example amenity of surrounding 'treescape' and fire risk.
- In addition absentee owners decrease opportunities for neighbourhood fire planning.

## Emotional response

### Self reports of 'panic' or 'calm' or 'panic and calm' during the fire event

A number of people spoke about their emotional reactions, and offered suggestions about the impact of these reactions on their decision making.

**Table 11 Self reports of mixed emotional responses.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Panic/Anxiety | 4 |
| B | Calm | 6 |
| C | Both panic/anxiety and calm | 3 |

Thirteen interviewees reported either a level of panic, anxiety, calmness or a degree of both during the Mt Bold fire. We have created three categories A, B or C to show the clusters of how people reported these emotional responses to the fire.

Category A is a cluster of 4 cases that indicated that their initial reaction to the Mt Bold fire was one of panic. Interviewees highlighted particular circumstances on the day in their retelling. One family who had young children in their care (who were not usual residents, but family members) reported

> …It was very close, so we had everything packed to leave, and I was really scared that day…It's awful …It was near me, but for the people that experienced it being right there in their backyard or front yard, it must have been horrific for them. I think I'd be an absolute mess to be honest.

While ostensibly telling a story of how difficult it was for others, the vividness of the painful memories for this interviewee was palpable.

The second case in this cluster suggested that due to shock she was unable to think rationally about what she needed to do.

> …I don't know, your mind goes into shock, and you sort of just run around on adrenaline and that's why I didn't think about changing into more sensible clothing. My main objective was the animals, and to try and protect my stables, and stuff like that.

One of the remaining 2 cases found themselves in a circumstance that they had not prepared for. This household had always planned to stay and defend, but on the day their vehicle was packed and contained most of their valuables. As they had not anticipated such circumstances in relation to the threat of fire, they felt at risk and anxious and were unsure what to do.

The final case in this cluster was on holiday at the time when they had heard about the fire. Being some distance away caused this family increased anxiety, as they were unable to 'do' anything, and had to rely on the support of neighbours and friends for information and to tend to their animals. This reliance on the neighbours had a positive outcome, as this household has since been more attentive to knowing and interacting with neighbours, which we discuss elsewhere.

Category B is a cluster of 6 cases who indicated that their initial reaction to the Mt Bold fire was one of calmness. This state appeared to be due to the household either being confident and prepared, or that they were less aware than some others of the proposed risk. The opportunity to use the retelling of the story to also gain some greater control through the retelling may also have been a factor.in their account. .

One case in this cluster reported that they didn't panic; they determined that the fire was coming towards them and that 'it didn't look good'. They explained that they felt they both have enough life experience so that if they are in a situation where there is nothing they can do, they take the stance that they can't 'worry about it'. Another 3 cases in this cluster reported that they felt prepared and

confident enough to manage the approaching fire. Of the remaining 2 cases in this cluster one case reported that they were not affected by the fire and sat on the veranda, had a drink and watched the fire. The second household in this group were not overly aware of the risks associated with the fire and therefore remained fairly calm.

Category C is a cluster of 3 cases who reported both anxiety and subsequent calmness during the fire. In most circumstances panic was felt by at least one household member, while the other reported that they were confident and felt relatively calm. The first case in this cluster consisted of a couple; the wife reported that she was 'dithering around' about what to do as she was feeling 'a little panicky'. The dithering was of short duration. This couple then reported thinking

> 'Well, we had better do something now, it's coming our way; this is finally going to happen.'

In the second case in this cluster, the husband reported that his wife felt confident to manage in his absence with the assistance of her father in law. However their daughter, who was absent from the premises at the time, was anxious about the welfare of her family, and made it clear that she didn't want them to stay at their (fire threatened) home over night. The family acceded to the daughters strongly put views.

The final case in this cluster also had conflicting feelings of being confident and anxious. The wife in this household who, while agreeing to stay and defend, was anxious due to wanting to protect her children from an awareness of the fire danger. The owner in the household (mother in law) felt reasonably confident.

> I can operate the pump and things like that, so I wasn't worried. I had the confidence that something would happen because breezes change and…that sort of thing

### Summary: Self reports of panic or calm or panic and calm

- Emotions were triggered by a range of factors including
  - the proximity of the fire
  - the desire to protect children from anxiety
  - the conflicted decision particularly for women as to which family member's needs took precedence, and
  - reliance on others to carry out tasks one would normally carry out for oneself in the proximity of the fire
- Being prepared appeared to be a ballast against anxiety for some and the capacity to work as a team was steadying
- The panic that our interviewees reported acted as a barrier to thinking clearly, which affected the ability to act during the fire
- Some moved seemingly quickly through this state of panic into more focussed action.

## Emotional Responses post fire

Broadly speaking ongoing emotional impacts can, at least in the first instance, be grouped as ‘problematic’ or ‘positive’.

**Table 12 Ongoing emotional impacts**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Problematic | 4 |
| B | Positive | 3 |

Seven cases spoke about the ongoing emotional impact that the fire has had. Four of these 7 cases indicated that this impact has had a problematic effect on a member of the household (Category A). The remaining 3 cases indicated that the impact of the fire has had a positive affect particularly on their sense they could manage their property if another fire was to occur (Category B).

Category A is a cluster of 4 cases who reported that a member of the household has experienced an ongoing emotional impact since the Mt Bold Fire. These responses were variable in their self-reported severity. One household member indicated that she was shocked by the fire and was very scared for the well being of her family, particularly visiting adult children and a grandchild. The emotion appeared to contain elements of the shock of the speed of somatic change from ‘relaxed’ to ‘highly stressed’. She also felt the additional burden of responsibility for visiting family members, particularly a baby. This emotion was still evident during the interview. This speed of change was verbalised in the following way.

> It was a Wednesday night and a group of us were going to the pub. It was just being in that casual relaxed moment, to being panicky, from relaxed to stressed within a matter of minutes.

The remaining 3 cases in this cluster reported other ongoing impacts. In one case the researcher arrived for the interview at the same time as the mother and teenage daughter returned to their home in their vehicle. The mother explained part way through our interview, when it was clear the daughter was remaining in the car in the garage:

> Why my daughter probably is not coming out, is she hates me talking about the fire.

While the researcher did not seek to explore this, the mother suggested one reason for her daughters’ distress may have been due to the loss of treasured childhood items and some pets. The mother had tried to prepare her daughter for this when she first brought her home to the property after the fire. However her careful preparation seemed not to lessen the impact of the shock and sense of loss.

The second interviewee in this group, a single woman, reported that she was considering selling and moving from the area as she no longer felt competent to live alone and to be able to defend herself or her property adequately in the event of a bushfire.

The final case in this cluster reported that due to the distressing events during the fire she has since lost interest in attending to her property.

> I go to the occasional [specific interest outing] but I haven't done that for months and months….I mean…basically since the fire, I've done nothing with the [animals]. I've neglected the garden, I just lost all the initiative. There never used to be a weed in the lawn or a weed in the flower beds. I used to do it all ; I've just lost all that initiative to do it.

Category B is a cluster of 3 cases who reported that the impact of the fire had a positive affect on their confidence if they were to experience another fire threat. One case described how since the experience they now know what to expect. However they recognised the need to remain vigilant and not become complacent.

> [Husband] We sort of figure now that since we've been through it, we know what to expect, we know what to do.
>
> [Wife] Then again, that's where you get cocky and get caught.
>
> [Husband] I'm not saying that, but I wouldn't do many things differently to what we did probably.

The second case in this cluster reported that they were almost pleased to have a chance to practice their plan, as it illustrated that they have the confidence and ability to stay and defend and would have no hesitation staying in any future fires. This has decreased their concern, a positive outcome contributing to their mental health.

> Things went so well that I actually even appreciate having had a chance to practice it, because I think we will be OK, and I have no concern about staying here and when the fire front has gone through, going out there and getting rid of all the embers and so on. No, got no problems on that now.

The final case in this cluster also reported an increase in confidence that they can defend themselves and their home, a positive outcome.

> Certainly we've come out of it with probably more confidence than we had before it happened.

This person also noted that even though they feel more confident, this does not mean that the fire did not cause them distress, especially as there are still visual reminders of the impact of the fire.

There is clearly a range of expectations and response to the likelihood of the fire threat. For some, life experience such as farming is affirmed. For others their efforts to invest time and resources to prepare for the event of fire were affirmed. Other people found that the risk of bushfire is an anxiety that influences lifestyle choices, both their own and/or those of their neighbours. Some interviewees have had conversations with neighbours about the possibility of leaving the area.

> I know a number of people who have talked about leaving, selling up and going somewhere else since the fire, some of it is just not wanting to be in an unsafe situation anymore.

One rationale for this way of thinking suggested to us was that for some residents, the fire was a reminder that living in the area was not as easy as it initially may have appeared to be. Such demands as managing the land, organising horses and other livestock, can prove to be more time consuming and taxing than originally anticipated. However, other interviewees suggested that people are resilient to loss and devastation. It takes time to rebuild and

recover but people are able to do this. This viewpoint is summarised by phrases used by interviewees, such as ‘it just takes time’ and ‘the experience makes the community wiser’.

### Summary: Ongoing emotional impacts

- Post fire emotional impact was apparent in our observations and interviewee self reports
- Some of these impacts appeared to be both enhancing of and detrimental to interviewees’ states of mind. One interviewee was strongly considering moving out of the area
- One resident reported a loss of life interest in usual pleasures
- One resident reported that the speed of the fire and ongoing unanswered questions has left an ongoing sense of vulnerability
- Several residents reported that they were reassured that their plans worked, and they expressed an increase in confidence in managing in a future fire event.

## The “Act” of Taking Action

The Table below sets out some responses to the fire event which on face value could be seen as actions which increase risk. Eight accounts of what are usually regarded as risky activities are set out: 4 have to do with packing the car, and 4 are other activities including: fighting the fire with inadequate resources, trying to get home, and helping others to the detriment of their own property.

**Table 13: Reports of action taking under threat**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Packed Car | 4 |
| B | Other Action | 4 |

Category A is a cluster of 4 cases who reported that during the fire they packed the car although this activity was not part of their plan prior to the event. It is common to hear reports in fire events, of people packing the car. We have an open mind about how best to interpret this, as it may not always be what it seems. On face value, it is usually portrayed as evidence of ambivalence at best, and at worst as evidence of an intention, perhaps subconscious, of fleeing at the last minute. In our view, some of these actions could also be seen as a way to keep occupied during a stressful event, rather than having an intentional purpose beyond the immediate activity. In the event, none of the 4 cases in Category A actually left during the fire, although two cases did report that they might have done so if their partners had been prepared to do this.

Category B is a cluster of 4 cases who reported various actions taken that may be considered as risky behaviour. The first case in this cluster verbalised the need to do something, which in the event, was to squirt the flames with a low pressure gravity fed hose, even though he knew it was ineffective.

> Very humiliating, to take out a garden hose and go to the edge of the fencing – flames coming at you about 12 feet high, roaring up the hill and the water was trickling out. But you still do it, even though it didn't do a damn bit of good. But you feel that you have to do something.

Family members in the second case reported their observations of one aspect of the husband's fire response, a response which was required most of that first night and in the follow up days.

> He was up the other side of the dam looking at a smoking stump, and we were standing watching him and he was spraying it with his knapsack …. We could see a CFS truck going down the corner ……He was busy concentrating on his little fire there, and it came along and went (spraying sound) and just about blasted him out of the ground……. He had to do what he had to do, but they came along and helped him do it better.

Of the remaining 2 cases in this cluster one household reported that they spent their time trying to get through road blocks trying to get home. There seemed some dissonance in the picture painted of this family's strenuous effort to get home, despite their plan which had always been to leave the home in the event of a fire. Having spent considerable time and effort getting through two road blocks, this interviewee noted:

> I knew by then that there was no point in three women aged between 14 and 77, …… in us going anywhere near the fire. I was just ….trying to get information and I realised by then too, don't get in their way.

The final case in this cluster took risky behaviour by driving toward the fire in order to try and assist friends in removing horses from danger.

While these four cases differ in relation to the concrete tasks they were carrying out, one common thread which we think connects these cases, is that the people concerned 'did something'. The 'doing something' either seemed to focus efforts and perhaps kepts their minds concentrated and 'contained', or it allowed time to elapse. With the passage of time, more thoughts were able to surface, and time also allowed for other experiences to occur along the way. One example of this was provided by the interviewee who in her efforts to get through a road block encountered a particular emergency service official whose considered interaction with her contributed to her realising that she should now cease trying to get home, thereby increasing her chances of staying safe. Unbeknownst to this interviewee at the time, a neighbour was monitoring her home.

### Summary: The act of taking action

- Doing 'something' when faced with the threat of fire, something which may on face value seem to lack purpose, may provide some mental stability which itself acts as a ballast to panic
- Packing a car might, for some, be one such activity
- Other examples which could be included in this general category include fighting the fire with equipment ill matched to the task, or allowing time to elapse while attempting to get home, ultimately 'allowing time to realise' that this was not a good idea
- Interpreting the meaning of people's actions during fire needs to be engaged with carefully, thoughtfully, and we would argue, humbly.

## Local and or specialised knowledge

Six cases reported that they tended to rely on specific skills and resources to assist them both during the fire and in preparing for a fire. These 6 cases have been categorised in the Table below as A,B and C, being three themes of local knowledge, weather knowledge and utilising other non CFS related resources.

**Table 14 local and/or specialised knowledge**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Local Knowledge | 2 |
| B | Weather | 2 |
| C | Other Resources | 2 |

Category A is a cluster of 2 cases that reported that they used their local knowledge to prepare themselves for a bushfire. One of these two cases reported that they had grown up within the area; and that living in the area for a long period of time has enabled them to understand its particular environmental conditions.

> If you stand outside, you know the way the wind blows, you know all of these things because you lived here so long

The second case in this cluster also reported that they had lived in the area their whole life and understood fire behaviour

> [Name] ……. is unflappable; he just does it. He gets out, [and] gets on with it. One hundred people can ring and say there is a fire coming through but if [name] says there isn't, then I believe him, because he's always been right in the past.

Category B is a cluster of 2 cases that reported that the weather, the wind in particular, was an influential factor in the action they would take on the day of a fire. It was also a factor in how they made preparations to be fire ready at their residence. One of these two cases reported that they built their house in accordance to wind direction, as they observed how the 'wind loops over the hill'. So their theory is

> because we are on the top of the hill we think maybe it [the fire] might crown over the top of us.

The second case in this cluster monitored the weather channel rather than relying on CFS radio updates. The marine related hobby of the male in this household requires a good understanding of weather and wind patterns, which helped him predict the behaviour of the fire.

Category C is a cluster of 2 cases that reported that they utilised non CFS provided resources to ascertain the intensity and proximity of the fire. Both of these cases used non CFS official websites to monitor fire proximity and intensity. One household reported that they used Google Earth to check the proximity of the fire.

> Everyone was at work when they heard about the fire – didn't think it was so close –[I] jumped on Google Earth and could see how close everything is.

The other case in this cluster reported that they stumbled across a website.

> We discovered accidentally that there was a website that we could log on to which is not the CFS website. It's an emergency services website and what it records is reports of …. fire, …… and by a series of pieces of data, it says how many units have been called out to attend. Now what that does for me, is it enables me to go straight on from hearing …on the radio that there is a fire at somewhere, and clock onto it and see that the CFS have got 2 water bombers, they called up 2 water bombers, not that they are necessarily there, and there are 10 units or 2 units or whatever number of units have been asked to attend. Now if you see 10 units and a couple of water bombers you know it's serious. If it's one unit attending then at that stage it's not serious

We have been unable to identify the website this interviewee was speaking of.

## Summary: Local and or specialised Knowledge

- Those who had resided in the district for considerable periods had local environmental knowledge which they drew on to assess the fire risk
- Others had a good understanding of weather patterns, one for reasons unrelated to land tenure
- Others used internet resources which were not the usual ones highlighted. (such as Google Earth)

## Community members capacity to recognise risk

Thirteen of the 18 households interviewed reported that they visually monitored the progression of the fire. Some reasons given for the need for visually monitoring the fire were due to the radio reports received not being up to date enough. [This will be discussed in a different section]. As one household reported

> We kept an eye on it, literally, it went so quickly

Regarding the radio broadcasts, he continued:

> It's hard to get information on which way it's heading, and this one we watched

Five of the 18 cases reported that initially they were notified of the fire by others, as visibility from their properties was poor and they would have been unable to detect a fire coming from a far distance away. At least 3 of these 5 cases including one case in the previously mentioned group, organised a mode of transport to drive to a vantage point to gain a better perspective of the fire intensity and direction.

> I got on the [motor] bike and went straight up the top of the hill to see where it was going. When I got up there I could see it was heading in an easterly direction, so I rang the CFS straight away.

One household needed to visually monitor the fire to counter information coming from the radio. The radio information was leading family and friends to call her for reports of her safety, but the radio information was dated, and she was not in the direct line of the way the fire was actually progressing.. The final case in this cluster reported that they could see smoke all around but were unable to see the actual fire.

### Summary: Community members capacity to recognise risk

- Visual monitoring – Residents visually monitored the fire, or had neighbours in more elevated geographical positions who did this for them
- Some reported doing this due to broadcasts being out of date.

## Intra-household communication: Relationships and Technology

### Intra-family relationships

Some family members had worked together in relation to fire planning and preparation and were able to put the understandings reached into action in a coordinated way. Some family members were separated at the time the fire started, and could not demonstrate how they might have worked together.

We describe only one family's experience of planning together, as it was a family where two generations worked together to plan, where all were present at the time of the fire, and where their strong capacity to work in together to develop the shared plan, paid off 'in the moment'. The parents in this household positively affirmed the commitment made by their adult daughter, who kept asking that they develop a plan together that she and other family members could follow in the event of a fire. The daughter was mindful that it may be her alone with an elderly relative if a fire was to break out during a weekday. This daughter also was explicit that she needed guidance on how to operate the sophisticated equipment which her parents had in place, and the sequential nature in which activities needed to be carried out..

Family members demonstrated a high tolerance for the length of time it actually took the family (over several sessions) to get the detail documented to everyone's understanding and satisfaction. This very much seemed a team effort, where the parents had put a lot of effort into the more tangible aspects of preparation, and the daughter seemed to play a key role in integrating this work into a whole, a significant contribution in itself. There were other examples of this high level of tolerance for detailed planning over time.

### Technology

Several households had to manage in the fire event without their usual communication aids of mobile phones and landlines. Several households reported having the 'technology' but not the actual mobile numbers of neighbours, something they would have liked to have had. This is discussed further under community connectedness.

### Summary: Communication: relationships and technology

- The ability to communicate well as a family unit enhanced residents' capacity to plan together and shoulder the frustrations that detailed planning imposes
- Some interviewees lost their capacity to use their mobiles and landlines, and some who retained the use of their phones did not have numbers of neighbours, something they regretted during the fire event.

## Influence of the presence of children.

The presence of children impacts on household decision making. The Table below sets out those households in the research who had children, the ages of those children, and whether they were at home at the time of the fire or not.

**Table 15 Presence of Children**

| Age | Category | Children at home | No of Households | | Category | Children Not at Home | No of Households | Total No. of Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Up to 12 | A | 5 | 4 | | B | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| 12-19 | C | 2 | 1 | | D | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 20-21 | E | 2 | 2 | | F | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | | 9 | 7 | | | 5 | 4 | 14 |

Of the 18 families interviewed, 9 households either had children living at home permanently or at their residence on the day of the fire. Five families had 1 child, 3 families had 2 children and 1 family had 3 children, totalling 14 children. The above table provides categories of children by age and whether they were home or not on the day of the fire. We have included a smaller age bracket of 20 – 21 as we felt these cases were important to discuss. To enable us to easily reference these clusters we have divided the above cases into categories A,B,C,D,E and F. In 2 families, only *some* of their children were at home during the fire. Due to this, these two families are represented in each of two categories and are therefore referred to on two separate occasions below.

Category A consists of a cluster of 5 children under the age of 12, who were home on the day of the fire. These 5 children relate to 4 separate households. From these 4 households, 2 families had their adult son or daughter visiting. The adult son and adult daughter both had relatively new marital partners and these partners were not Australian born, and in both cases had young babies in their care. In the remaining 2 cases, 1 family had 2 children who lived at the property on a permanent basis. The remaining case in this cluster has two children, [although the older child, not represented here, forms part of cluster D].

Category B consists of 2 children under the age of 12 who were not at home on the day of the fire. These two children form part of one household. At some stage during the course of the fire, the children were taken home, which would, if this could be visually represented, shift them to Category A.

Category C consists of 2 children between the ages of 12 and 19 who were at home during the fire. These children form part of one household. This household has 3 children of whom the eldest (a young adult) forms category F.

Category D is a cluster of 2 children from 2 cases between the ages of 12 to 19 who were not at home during the fire. From these 2 cases, one family was on holiday and were driving home when they first heard about the fire. The remaining household has two children, although these two children were not

together during the fire. The younger child in this household who is not represented in this category forms part of cluster A.

Category E is a cluster of two young adults between the ages of 20 and 21 who were at home on the day of the fire. These 2 young adults relate to 2 categories. In one of these two cases, the young adult left the premises during the course of the fire, which could also place him in category F. The remaining young adult in this cluster remained at home and played an active role in assisting the household in defending the home from the fire.

Category A.

The two households that had visitors and a young baby staying at their home during the fire, discussed how the presence of having a young baby in the home influenced their decision to stay or go. Of these two cases, one woman felt that having a child in the house did change the way she responded to the fire. She had always planned to stay but having a young baby in the house made her consider leaving. In addition to thinking alternatively about her plan, having her sons' partner who had no experience with bushfire at the property, caused her some concern, as during the course of the fire she sent her son to get some supplies. On reflection she felt this was a "terrible thing", given the daughter in law was at home without her husband, in unfamiliar circumstances, and with a young baby. Our interviewee did not get the opportunity to explain to her that in her opinion her husband would be alright.

The women in the second household, who also had visitors and an infant present, felt that having a baby in the house influenced her decision to want to leave. She conveyed to us, both verbally and non-verbally, that the presence of the baby heightened her level of anxiety about the fire. 'I guess it's because I had the family here as well, you know like the baby, and it was pretty scary.' In the event, she did not end up leaving the premises, as her husband did not want to leave and she was unwilling to leave her husband.

The third household in this cluster have two young children who were both present on the day of the fire. The children were in the care of their mother who was trying to keep them as unaware of the fire as possible. The mother told of the young boy being fascinated by all the helicopters, and that he did not express any fear to her. However, in contrast, his sister was described by the mother as 'hysterical' and needing comforting and reassurance during the fire. Despite loading the cars with valuables, pets and children, the mother and children did not leave. This family expressed strong feelings of the importance of staying together; either all staying or all going. Someone did ring and offered to take the children.:

> I did have friends ring up and say, do you want me to come and pick the children up but I don't think they wanted to leave me and I wasn't prepared to leave [her husband]'.

The final household in this cluster was a young family who have two children. This family had done extensive house and household preparation. The older child and the father were away during the fire but the younger child was home with her mother. The mother reported that she did not feel at any time that she or her child were in danger and would not consider leaving the house during a fire, an approach she and her husband had planned carefully.

> I feel safe in this house. Even when the fire was there, I didn't feel threatened by the fire really; I felt as if it would be safe.

This family discussed foreseeable issues that they may encounter as their youngest daughter got older. In the recent fire the wife was able to place the child in her play pen which enabled her to put the fire plan into action. However if another fire occurred now, she would be able to climb out of the play pen. The parents discussed various options they had considered as to how they would manage with the daughter depending on her developmental stage. Among these options were picking her up and carrying her while they engaged in their preparedness and response activities, or if necessary leaving her temporarily in a secure room.

Category B.

The only household in this category had members who were not at home at the time they first became aware of the fire. The father of these children had picked them up and taken them to their grandparents who were close by. The parents had decided to leave the children at their grandparents place as they felt that the children would be less concerned away from the fire.

> We had left them there because we did not want them to be upset and afraid of what was happening because they would be unsure when they saw all that going on.

While the children were with grandparents, this household assisted others with removing valuables from friends' homes and relocating distressed animals, As this family's home was not under direct threat from the fire, the father of the children picked them up from their grandparents and took them home.

Category C.

The household in this category has 3 children. Two of the younger children were home at the time the fire occurred. When the family first heard of the fire, the mother contacted the eldest child who was not home at this stage. After confirming with him that he would prefer to stay where he was, a decision his mother concurred with as the location was safer than his home. This family expressed several times during their interview that they placed most importance in getting the kids and animals to safety.

> For me I have always known that my priority was to get the children and animals out. We can always rebuild. I'd try and get as many valuables out as possible… but if it came to the crunch, it would be the kids and animals first; everything else is replaceable.'

In the event the family did not end up leaving the premises. After the animals and kids were packed, they watched weather and fire reports to ascertain how close the fire was, and expected they would be notified by the CFS if they were required to leave.

Category D.

The two children from this cluster are from two different households. Both were teenagers and were away from the family home at the time the fire occurred. In one of the two households, the family had been on holidays and were driving home when they first became aware of the fire. As they were several hours away from their home at this time, they relied on telephone contact and radio broadcasts to keep them informed of the fire activity. We have reported already on the decisions made by this mother in trying to juggle her own need for information, and the daughter's wishes to turn the radio off. We have also already commented on the apparent depth to which this daughter was affected 10 months on.

The other teenager in this cluster was also very distressed about the fire. Before the fire occurred this teenager was very involved with typing up the fire plan and ensuring that the plan was reviewed on a regular basis.

> … She was pretty active in getting involved in doing that. She actually typed it up and took all the notes, sat there and scribed and typed it up on the computer.

This young person was not at home when the fire began, and she became distressed when she could not contact her mother (who was at home and under threat) due to the phone lines being down. After the initial threat of the fire had passed, the family left the home, as the teenage daughter was adamant that she did not want them at the house overnight.

> We decided to leave, not really because we particularly wanted to, or felt we needed to, but [name] … made it clear she felt a lot more comfortable if her mum wasn't here that night.

Category E.

Although not classified as 'children', the two families in this cluster both included a young adult under the age of 22. We felt it necessary to include these cases in this section as both of these young adults were present during the fire. In one of these two households the young adult son left the premises during the course of the fire, prompting the disapproval (conveyed to us at interview) of another adult in the home, about this course of action**.**

> I was very disappointed, I mean to me, something, whatever it is, you grab a rifle and you go shoulder to shoulder and you fight to the death, you don't bloody run ……But I shouldn't be knocking the younger ones, he's got his own [strengths].' [which this adult then outlined to us]

We were told this young man was quite distressed during the fire and that before he left, he begged his mother to bring the domestic animals and to leave with him, which she did not do.

The other young adult in this cluster played an important role in her family's planning and preparation prior to the fire. We have commented on her role in 'intra family relationships' above. Her father expressed that he felt his daughter remained very calm during the fire, especially in comparison to another young person who passed by their property, who was described to us as 'very rattled' and did not know what to do.

> …He's a young lad, just a couple of years older than [his daughter]. Put him next to [daughter] ….. and there is no comparison. She knew exactly what she was doing.

An indirect impact of having children was the extent to which connections were created within ordinary community life by having children. This is distinct from the impact of having children on community life in a disaster, although we argue later for the close relationship between these two types of connectedness. Several people identified the local school as a source of community information where people find out about meetings or events some of which may be related to bushfire safety. One person mentioned the CFS cadets program and the importance of education about bushfires for children. She remarked that kids are good at pricking their parent's conscience when it comes to bushfire preparedness.

## Summary: Influence of the presence of children

- The emotional response driving responsibility for parents, particularly women, to protect children from bushfire, may lead families to make risky decisions such as changing a plan and risking leaving late.
- Households found themselves with non residential adult children and young families at the time of the fire, and the presence of these visiting family impacted in specific ways.
- The presence of young children caused residents to rethink their plan toward the possibility of leaving the property, although in the event, none did this
- Some women expressed responsibilities divided between getting young children out of the district and staying with their husbands who were defending the property
- Having extended family to care for children released one couple to assist community members with their fire response
- Two teenage girls and a young male adult were described as particularly distressed by the fire event, in one case causing the family to change their plan
- For some, having children increased their vulnerability, for others it enhanced their capacity to plan and respond in pre-fire community networks
- The presence of children generally increased people's access to one another as neighbours and community members.

## The influence of animals on decision making

The influence of animals on people's planning and response to the fire was identified as one of the focuses of this study. All of the households interviewed had pets and/or livestock. Seven had cattle, five had sheep, three kept horses, and many had dogs, cats, chickens and other animals. In some cases people had a couple of sheep or cows for the primary reason of keeping the grass on the property well grazed as a fire safety measure. Others were farmers or had a business breeding pets. One person had moved to the area specifically so she could keep horses.

People talked about planning for pets and livestock and the action they took to keep animals safe during the fire. In some cases interviewees took action to care for animals that potentially increased their own risks, while others were clear that they would not put themselves at risk to save an animal. Some people reported being under-prepared in relation to their animals and in some cases were not sure of the best course of action for keeping animals safe.

Of the 18 families interviewed, 17 households referred to the issue of animal safety. The Table below outlines 7 categories of A to I. In these categories we have clustered households whose responses were similar when it came to ensuring the safety of their animals.

**Table 16 Risk taking in relation to care of animals**

| | Category | Plan | | Category | No Plan | | Category | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Risk | A | 4 | | B | 2 | | | |
| No Risk | C | 2 | | D | 1 | | E | 1 |
| Neighbours took Risk | F | 1 | | G | 2 | | | |
| Not Specified | H | 3 | | I | 1 | | | |

Category A is a cluster of 4 cases where interviewee responses suggested that they were willing to increase their own risk in order to look after their animals. These cases identified that prior to the fire they did have a plan in place to assist the animals.

Category B is a cluster of 2 cases where the data suggest that action taken would potentially increase interviewees own risk in order to look after their animals. However these cases did not identify having a plan for their animals, prior to the fire.

Category C is a cluster of 2 cases where interviewee responses suggested that they would not put themselves at risk to look after their animals. These cases also indicated that prior to the fire they had a plan in place to assist their animals.

Category D comprises 1 household where the members suggested that they would not put themselves at risk to look after their animals. They also mentioned that they were unsure how to plan for larger animals.

Category E comprises 1 case where interviewees indicated that they could not understand how people could risk their own life for animals.

Category F comprises 1 case where interviewees reported that their neighbour took some action in relation to rescuing animals which the interviewees reported potentially increased their (their neighbours) risk.. This household also reported that these neighbours did have a plan prior to the fire.

Category G is a cluster of 2 households who reported that their neighbours put themselves and the interviewees' households at risk due to the action the neighbours took to try and look after their animals. Such action by neighbours impacted on households seeking to assist them, as the neighbours were unprepared and did not have a plan for their animals.

Category H is a cluster of 3 households where we understood them to have a plan for their animals. It was not established if this plan would increase the potential individual risk.

Category I comprises 1 case where our understanding was that this household did not have a plan for their animals.

<u>Category A</u>

Two of the 4 households in this cluster felt that the safety of their dogs would be the primary reason for coming home during a fire if safe to do so. In one of these cases the dogs are old and would need assistance. In both instances

these households felt that they could call on their neighbours for assistance if they were unable to reach home safely. One of these two households had an explicit agreement with the neighbour to look after each others' pets, if one or the other is not at home at the time of a fire. The other case in this cluster had not discussed this issue but were confident that their neighbours would help the pets if they could.

The remaining two households in this cluster indicated that their plan was to come home, collect the animals and leave. One of these 2 case's first response when they heard about the fire was to try and get home as their primary concern was the welfare of their animals. This interviewee said she started speeding.

> ….To know if my animals were safe. I suppose I wanted to know if the house was burnt to the ground too, but that was secondary to the animals.

While this family tried various ways to get home during the fire, it was after they were reassured by the neighbour that the dog and other animals were safe, that their anxiety at waiting to be allowed through road blocks decreased.

The other case in this cluster had made prior arrangements with a racecourse that horses could be taken there if they needed to leave the property. The horses were put in floats ready to leave if necessary.

Category B

One of the two cases in this category was very concerned about horses being trapped on properties (not their own property as they believed they were not directly at risk) and drove towards the fire with a horse float trying to evacuate horses from other people's properties. The other household in this cluster lost a horse in the fire. The household reflected that in future they would keep ropes and halters in a more accessible position, as this might have helped save the horse.

Category C

The two households in this category discussed the plan they had in place for their animals during a fire event. One of these two households would bring the cat inside if they were at home at the time of the fire. This household indicated, however, they would not come home specifically to ensure the cats' safety, as they felt that it would be able to find a safe place to shelter on its own initiative.

The second household in this cluster had a detailed plan for their stock but didn't have time to carry it out. This family specified that although the animals were considered more than just stock, protecting family members and the home must and did take priority.

Category D

The one case in this category identified that they would not risk human life for animals. During a previous fire this interviewee recalled thinking about leaving the gates to the paddocks open so the horses could escape. However she decided not to let them on the road in case they caused an accident

> I thought, no, I won't do that because if the horses get on the road and there is a CFS truck coming, that could result in them being killed or injured, so I won't risk human life for the animals.

In this current fire this household was unsure of how to plan for horses and the difficulty of predicting animal and bushfire behaviour.

Category E

The one case in this category thought that going back to collect animals during a fire was extraordinarily risky and unwarranted behaviour.

Category F

The one household in this category mentioned that their neighbours had horses agisted on their property. Their neighbours called the owners of these agisted horses and arranged for them to be picked up, as the fire did not directly threaten this property and there was time to get the horses out.

> I went down and they'd organised their agistees to come with horse floats to pick up their horses and take them away. This included their own horses, so through the night, they were in fact loading horses and taking horses away.

Our interviewee indicated that in his opinion it was late and risky to be doing this during the night, with the fire still active.

Category G

The two households in this category both spoke of neighbours whose actions potentially increased their risk in order to protect their animals. Our interviewees spent time assisting the neighbours who did not have a plan and were concerned with the welfare of their animals. One interviewee described the experience:

> …They were unprepared and one of them was panicking … He wouldn't go because his 'baby' was there, his dog. I went down and got the dog and put it in our car…but then he got in the car, ….opened the door…it jumped out and ran back…. and that didn't help.

Category H

The three cases in this cluster indicated that they had made a plan for their animals. It was not clear during the interview if these households would take action that may be considered as potentially increasing their own risk. However we record these comments as they emphasise the importance of animals in the lives of our interviewees. One of these 3 cases mentioned that the first action in their plan is to bring the cats inside and lock the cat door. Another case in this cluster mentioned that they would move the cattle to a safe area, then leave with the dog. The third case, although without animals at this time, in previous years would rug up the horses to keep the embers off, keep animals inside, keep animal leads close by, and, if possible, move them to a safer area.

Category I

The one case in this category felt unprepared during the fire in relation to the safety of their animals. They felt that the chickens and cows would have to be sacrificed, as they did not know what else they could really do with them.

Other observations

Interviewees made some further observations that pertained to the presence of animals in a fire event. One interviewee recounted an event from Ash Wednesday. His experience then in relation to animals was how people herded

goats, sheep and cattle down the main road. This created real problems, with animals blocking vehicle access.

Several households reported that during the fire, animals seem to have an instinct that alerts them to danger. One family who sheltered in their home as the fire passed through, commented on how amazing it was to see their sheep clustered together in a small area of bare ground after the fire had passed:

> I couldn't believe the sheep. There was just a little patch out the front here, and they were all standing on it

One person felt that the cat would be fine, as animals are smart and have an ability to find a safe haven in bad weather. Another person commented that animals are aware of fire and have the ability to move out of danger. This observation was shared by an interviewee who believed that cattle know about fire before they do. He noted that their cattle moved away from the fire to the highest point up by the water. Another person commented on the movement of wildlife

> Our neighbour first knew there was something going on when the kangaroos all started coming out of the scrub

Several people expressed concern for wildlife, in addition to concerns about pets and stock, but we did not explore this particular issue further at interview.

### Summary: Influence of animals on decision making

- All households had some pets or livestock
- Some animals were kept , at least in part, for property maintenance in terms of fire safety
- Half the households who talked of their decision making in relation to animals would put themselves at risk to save their animals
- Several households had a plan for their animals
- Some reported that they found it particularly difficult to know how best to care for their larger animals as there was uncertainty how their animals would respond
- Questions included what the safest places would be to move them to, and whether gates should be left open for them to be freer to escape
- Other residents, in relation to leaving gates open, expressed concern in terms of the safety of those on the road, as well as safety of the animals
- Some residents had plans with neighbours specifically in relation to animals
- Two households who assisted a neighbour reported that the neighbours' distress about his animals hampered their efforts to assist him, increasing the risk to all parties
- Animals that were aged and would need human assistance were a particular concern
- Some acknowledged the innate 'sense' of some animals' self protective behaviour and indirectly, that their behaviour, if 'noticed' by their owners, in the early stage of a fire event, can serve as a warning mechanism.

# Community level relationships: the presence, the potential and the barriers.

## Planning with Neighbours (prior to the fire)

We have data on 11 cases in relation to planning with neighbours prior to the fire event. The identified 11 cases have been separated into three different categories – those who indicated that they had made a plan with their neighbour before the fire (Category A), those who have spoken to their neighbour about fire preparedness (Category B), and those who have not spoken to their neighbour about any sort of fire preparation (Category C).

**Table 17 Planning with neighbours (prior to fire)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Have a Plan | 5 |
| B | Do not have a Plan | 4 |
| C | Have not spoken to Neighbours | 2 |

Category A

This is a cluster of 5 cases who reported during their interview that they have spoken to and have prepared some level of planning with their neighbour. These 5 households had made varied arrangements indicating a degree of thinking on a community level.

One person had swapped telephone numbers with neighbours so that they could alert each other if they became aware of a fire. Another family had a mutual arrangement with their neighbours that if one of the houses was unattended, whoever of them was at home would turn on the sprinkler system and look after the dogs. This household also had a good water supply that they had discussed sharing with the neighbour if the need arose.

Another family had a close relationship with their neighbours and had frequent discussions about planning and preparation.

We have already briefly reported under issues prompted by attendance at ‘community meetings’, that one resident was likely to be home alone if a fire started, and had made plans with two other nearby neighbours to shelter together, and return home after the front had passed. The home chosen as the one to shelter in was the one with the best water supply and fire fighting equipment. Their plan was to return to their respective homes after the fire front had passed to put out spot fires. The three households consider themselves as a support group that would check on each other to ensure that they were all OK.

In the other three cases there was an awareness of the plans of at least some of their neighbours.

Category B

This is a cluster of 4 cases where discussions had been held with neighbours about planning and preparation for bushfire but where cohesive plans had not been developed.

The first case in this cluster hosted a Community Fire Safe group at their home. Although it was not established if this household had discussed fire preparation with neighbours outside of the conversation within the Community Fire Safe Group context, some level of neighbourhood interaction had occurred at least in this context.

The second case in this cluster reported that their neighbour made the follow-up offer to them when they first moved in:

> When there is a fire, during the day, if [partner's name] is at work, and you are home by yourself, you come down to our place, you park your car, ……and you go into our hay paddock and we'll put the bore on.

This offer was not taken up and the household to whom the offer was made set about to establish their own plan and fire preparation system. We did not explore if the neighbour's offer and this household commencing their own planning was linked.

The third case in this cluster had spoken to their neighbour about what they would do in the event of a fire. This household reported that their neighbour was adamant that they would leave the property despite our interviewees attempt to explain that if you are well prepared there is a good chance of saving your house.

The fourth case in this cluster has had some interaction with their neighbour about fire and other issues. They felt confident that they could rely on them giving some assistance if a fire occurred.

Category C

This is a cluster of two households who had not had discussions with neighbours.

One couple had lived in the area for a long time and believed that there is no real need for discussion. "You know what to do and you do it". They said they had faith that others have read the information provided and that they also will know what to do. Another interviewee had not had a conversation with neighbours regarding bushfires, but commented that they speak to their neighbours in regards to other matters, and that while they wouldn't purposefully strike up a conversation about bushfire, if it was topical at the time, it may be discussed.

## Summary: Planning with neighbours (prior to the fire)

- The ways neighbours mutually assist each other range from:
    - ensuring they have each others' contact numbers
    - assisting turning on each others' sprinkler systems, and
    - looking after pets, through to
    - planning to shelter together in a fire event
- Others have discussed fire response issues with neighbours generally but have not developed any plan together
- One interviewee said discussions were not necessary as he knew what to do and expected others did too.

## Contact with significant others during the fire event

Fifteen separate cases reported that they had some level of contact with neighbours and other friends and families during the fire event. These forms of contact can be divided between supportive contact and contact that can be perceived as problematic. These differing types of contact have been created into two categories A and B as presented in the Table below.

**Table 18 Contact with significant others**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Supportive | 10 |
| B | Problematic | 6 |

Category A

This is a cluster of 10 cases that reported contact with other people (not household members) during the fire event which interviewees reported in a way which clearly denoted appreciation for the contact. The types of contact included face to face contact with neighbours, 'out of area' friend and family contacts who tried to get through to assist with protecting properties, and phone calls.

Six of these cases reported that during the fire they had some contact with their neighbours. This contact included phoning to check if others were alright, visiting each other to ensure that they were prepared and to discuss what to do, and also assisting each other with protecting properties. As there are many examples of contact with others during the fire we have selected only a handful of cases to illustrate the importance interviewees attributed to this intervention.

Many interviewees reported contacting neighbours to check that they knew that a fire had broken out and were alright. One person checked on an older neighbour to see if she needed any assistance. He was also in contact with another neighbour several times during the night as from his vantage point could see that the fire was getting pretty close to his neighbour's father's house.

Another person had a neighbour who kept them up to date on the movements of the fire:

> [Neighbour] was keeping me updated 'cause our phone line was down at the time… He was ringing me on my mobile and saying if you are going to go, now is the time, cause [husband] by this stage was down in our corner paddock because it had already got to our place and he was down there by himself fighting it in our place.

One case reported that a neighbour rushed over to their house during the fire. He was out helping a friend further up the road and remembered the couple (our interviewees) and came to check on them. While the visit was only brief, the couple reported that even the neighbours fleeting presence was very reassuring.

One couple reported receiving a phone call from their neighbour informing them of the fire. Based on what happened in a previous fire, the interviewee was not surprised by this, and described the neighbour as a 'very hands on type, who watched everything that goes on around the place'. There was a sense that the interviewees were grateful for this intervention and felt comforted by the knowledge that they had somebody close by who was seen as knowing 'what to do'.

In one instance a family was returning from a holiday when notified of the fire. They described as 'fantastic' the help they received both from the neighbour who looked after the family dog and stayed up all night patrolling for spot fires, and from a friend who helped with cleaning up the next day. They believed their neighbour's actions helped to save their home.

The remaining 4 cases in this cluster reported that family members or friends came over or attempted to come over to their properties to assist with fighting the fire. In 2 of these cases, the daughters of the families were unable to get through due to road blocks. The other 3 cases found the contact from family members or friends reassuring. One of these cases reported being assisted by friends with fire fighting experience whose property was not threatened and who lived in the next town. These friends came over to help, despite protests that their property was in the direct line of fire and that they shouldn't come. The assistance provided by these friends was particularly valued by the wife who was at the house alone while her husband was out fighting the fire on their property. Speaking of one of the two friends who came, the wife said:

> He just gets out and does it, no hassle, no strings. Just having them here was great

The final case in this cluster reported that a family member was able to reach the property and assist with defending the property as the wife in this household was home alone with her daughter.

<u>Category B</u>

This is a cluster of 6 cases where reported contact with other people during the fire that can be perceived as problematic. In these 6 cases contact with neighbours and others during the fire impacted on our interviewees' ability to prepare their own properties. This impact was most clearly expressed in 3 of these 6 cases, where time spent with neighbours detracted from interviewees' ability to focus their efforts. The first case in this cluster reported how a young neighbour came over and that he was unprepared and in a panic.

> He came over thinking he was going to help because they had nothing set up, but they were new, it was their first year in, and it just shows that someone in absolute panic gobbles up so much of your time. And if you haven't got it, you just don't want them around here

Both the second and third cases reported assisting a neighbour (in fact the same neighbour). In the end they had to 'leave them to it', as they felt they had spent time unproductively and they needed to prepare their own properties. The first of these two cases reported that

> …our biggest worry was [ reference to neighbours] down the end of the road and they probably concerned everybody ….because they didn't know what they were doing ….Too much time was spent trying to get them out……It got to the stage where we couldn't worry about them because we were too busy having to worry about what we were doing.

The second case in this group reported similar sentiments.

> At that stage of the game I gave up on them and I concentrated on what I had to do over here…..I wasn't going to go back and chase after them.

While attempting to leave the area himself, this interviewee also assisted another neighbour who hadn't been sure about what to do with his animals that were fenced in on his property.

> …[This] is the worst type of thing we could have done…We were walking back towards the fire, and circumstances saved us, because the wind change came and blew the fire towards the back of his house and past where the [animals] were

While the remaining 3 cases in this cluster of 6 were less explicit in expressing the problematic contact that they had with their neighbours, it is evident in their accounts that assisting their neighbours did cause them some concern. The first case in this group of 3 reported that when they told their neighbours about the fire, they were very blasé.

> It was their choice…..They were over here watching us pack

The second case in this group assisted friends in the area by driving to their houses, getting animals out, and collecting valuables from the house of a friend who was away at the time of the fire. Although this household did not feel that their property was threatened by the fire, it is evident that the time they spent assisting others was significant.

The final case in this group reported that their neighbour kept wandering down as he didn't know what to do.

> The neighbour kept coming down to see what was happening 'cause we had a better view – a good vantage point. The neighbour wasn't sure of what to do, so kept coming down to have a look.

## Summary: Contact with significant others during the fire event.

- Residents affirmed the importance of community connections in a variety of ways
- In some cases people were first notified about the fire by neighbours and were kept informed by neighbours or others in the community
- There was considerable mobile phone and landline phone traffic between distant family, neighbours, and friends from the first awareness of the fire
- People did not ignore neighbours who were at risk
- Even without prior discussions, people helped out neighbours as they were able including
    - checking on people who they thought might be vulnerable
    - looking after each others pets and stock
    - assisting both with fire fighting around homes and properties, and with departures
- Family and friends of several residents made efforts, both successful and unsuccessful, to get through to properties to offer assistance
- Unsuccessful attempts to make contact, and even fleeting contact as a demonstration of concern, were both experienced as supportive and meaningful
- There was some evidence of an increasing community expectation at the household level that all households engage in some preparedness activities, in order to maximise the value of assistance from other community members in a fire event
- Two households interviewed might make their future offers of assistance to others conditional on those others having engaged in some preparedness activity
- In two of the more prepared households, there was a sense of self sufficiency
- Some of those who were more focussed on doing what they knew needed to be done, reported some frustration at receiving calls that distracted them from preparing or fire fighting
- Some reports suggest those who don't know what do to may gravitate to others' households.

## Fire as a trigger to create community connections: post fire experiences

We have data arising from five interviews where reference was made specifically to an increase in contact with and planning with neighbours *after* the fire. This contact was informed by the mutual experience in the community of the fire event. We do not highlight here those interviewees who reported

positive relationships with neighbours which were already in place prior to the fire, although this is an important finding, and very relevant to the task of sustaining community connectedness.

Three households reported that due to community members experience with the fire, new relationships were developed following the fire, and a fourth thought that more people would work together in the future. A fifth interviewee made particular mention that after the fire, the community formed together to assist a family that had been badly affected by the fire. In the sixth case interviewees reported that they have since spoken to their neighbours in general about the importance of having a plan together, a conversation they had not had before the fire.

We comment here just on the first four cases.

One interviewee went ahead with a planned BBQ where one particular intended activity at the event was that neighbours exchanged telephone numbers, as the fire had highlighted the need to be able to contact each other.

The second household decided to organise a BBQ with people from the immediate area who were affected by the fire. Although they had spoken about the fire with concerned friends and relatives from outside the area, they found it particularly helpful to talk to people who had been through a similar experience. Interviewees commented that getting together provided an opportunity to exchange experiences, photos and stories. They highlighted how the fire assisted with a particular level of meaning which conversations were able to take on due to the shared experience. One mechanism which assisted this heightened sense of meaning was that explanations of what had happened were not required. In addition to the sense of relief implied in this ease of communication, the social gatherings also promoted stronger relationships amongst the neighbours which resulted in having more contact with them.

The third interviewee was involved in what local participants called a 'Fence Party.

> We'd take drinks over there and help them. We…. were helping the neighbours chop down trees that were still smouldering and things like that. And we'd just sit on the gate with a beer or something, which was really good.

In addition to helping each other, this fence party was also used as an opportunity to exchange contact details. The response of the fourth household was interesting as they were the more 'independent' farmer types. However one of these more independent household members noted:

> I think now a lot more people are thinking about it only because it's happened …..I think now a lot of people will work in together more and work out a bit of a plan together, rather than just separately.

As already discussed in the section on community meetings, there were high attendance levels at the community briefings organised during or soon after the fire and many people found that being with others, and sharing stories was one of the most important aspects of the meetings.

## Interviewees differing experiences of 'community'

Among the 18 households, members in 6 households provided some insight into their experience of 'the community'. As with other data in this report, these

can't be taken as views which represent all household members – only those with whom we spoke directly. While we have other comments about the importance of neighbours in relation to the fire event,, the comments below about different experiences of community seemed to us to pertain particularly to the wider community - as distinct from immediate neighbours - and existed, or had their roots in, experience prior to the fire.

Of the 8 cases we have identified, 3 response categories were apparent. We labelled these broadly as negative, neutral and positive views of the experience of community. We were not explicitly seeking views about prior experiences of community life during our interviews, but we deemed them appropriate to record here for the insight they provide into the challenges and opportunities which any community intervention, program or activity faces in connecting with community members.

Our first category (negative) consists of 3 cases.

The first case in this cluster recalled that when they first moved to the area over three decades ago, they felt as if they were regarded as outsiders. Our interviewees attributed this experience of exclusion to the fact that they were not Australian born. Despite living in the area for this period, our interviewees said they remained fairly unconnected to several aspects of community life.

The second case in this cluster also had less than positive view of the community. This household referred to the members of the community as 'rednecks' and indicated that they found they were more comfortable mixing in another community within the region. A male in the third household said when he approached the local brigade and offered his availability, the offer that was never taken up. This appeared to have been experienced by this person as a personal rejection.

Our second category (neutral) consists of 2 cases.

The first case in this cluster made reference on the one hand to their community as having a lot of "Rundle Street farmers" in it. They also referred to these new neighbours affectionately and commented that 'it's done wonders for our social life.' However there was a sense from this household that they did prefer the previous 'farmer style community', saying they hankered for the 'old days'.

The second case in this cluster reported that she kept mostly to herself. While maintaining a few social contacts within the community, she kept these limited, and said that for her this was a lifestyle choice.

Our third category (positive) consists of 3 cases.

The first case in this cluster reported coming to this community to pursue her passion, being horses, and felt quite connected to members of the community both due to this, and also to this community through the nature of her job in town.

The second case in this cluster reported that he and his wife liked the 'community feel' and that living in the area allowed him to 'play farmers' which was something he had always wanted to do and is the reason to why he is living in the area.

The third case, a newer arrival, felt very pleased with how they had been accepted.

> The people who live next door are farmers from the area. There has never been any discussion of we're a new arrival, never, and they have always been really helpful and just fabulous.

### Summary: Fire triggering community connections and interviewees experience of community.

- Opportunities to meet with others who had experienced the fire were valued highly: to 'exchange experiences, photos and stories'
- Phone numbers were also exchanged
- Events such as BBQ's initiated by community members provide one means for these exchanges
- There were also examples of neighbours assisting each other after the fire in different ways, including assistance such as providing psychological support and stock feed
- There were three cases that reported developing new relationships with others in the community after the fire and one report of the community working together to assist a family badly affected by the fire
- Community members in this sample represented different segments of community including:
    - farmers
    - vignerons
    - salaried blue and white collar workers
    - retirees, and
    - business executives
- Interviewees generally demonstrated some 'pre fire' connectedness with non friendship groups (neighbours), and a desire to increase that connectedness post fire
- A few noted a disinclination to mix with more diverse community members, and expressed more of an inclination to limit social contact to a few people, or to mix with like minded others in an adjacent community.

### Influence of informal contact with the Brigade

We have quite a bit of data which inform questions of the influence of informal contact between the brigade members and the community on aspects of the community's response to the threat of fire. We have held this over in order to discuss it more fully in the next section, entitled "'Agency Level Experiences".

## 2.4 Agency Level experiences

This section draws together a spectrum of different opportunities for, and examples of, association between the fire service and community members, for what these associations tell us about impact on community awareness and response to fire. The section looks at three issues in the following order:

- Informal contact between community members and members of the fire service (who are of course also typically community members)
- Expectations community members had of the CFS in terms of how they might be assisted by them during a fire
- Their actual experiences of the CFS during the Mt Bold fire.

### Informal contact between community members and with members of the fire service - pre fire

Informal contact with CFS members was a common experience among the people interviewed, and it is commented on here as one of the many means through which community members can and do increase their fire awareness. In some cases this contact was with neighbours or friends who are members of the CFS; several people mentioned having discussions about bushfire safety with a brigade captain (and or his wife) who run a local business. Some had relatives in the fire service. Two people mentioned that the CFS had attended their properties to conduct CFS training events.

One interviewee uses his family relationships as a vehicle to 'talk fire'.

> My son in law is in the CFS at [… ] and we often talk about things [related to fire].

Several interviewees spoke of the local captain as a source of information, and in fact, in the words of one interviewee, an 'icon'.

> I see [the local captain] a lot, he has the local [business], and we have long chats about this and that and [neighbour] up the road, he's a CFS man.
>
> Everyone knows [the local captain]; he is a positive icon in the community; lots of experience. And he is the person you think of when you think of fire.

Another interviewee talked of the two likely sources of information for his household as being a brigade captain and the local store.

> …The usual communication of anything that's local is via [brigade captain] ....[while at his business] or down the store when you're getting mail; they're the most likely sources of us obtaining information or asking information about something. That's a bit of bush telegraph in that, it's interesting what sort of stories you hear. Sometimes they are, well, that's probably what happened.

During a training event run by the CFS on his property, the interviewee discovered that he did not have a large enough turning circle for the CFS tanker. He has since removed vegetation to provide a turning circle.

> Neighbours down road, they are CFS and in regular contact with them….. CFS said they needed a training night and got rid of the rubbish. They know how to get into the property and we know now that

> a tree has to go, because it was hard to get the big truck through. Now we know.

We did not establish where or when the following resident took the opportunity to talk to the CFS about the likely impact of wind direction during a fire in relation to the position of his property. That he had done so was obvious however.

> …The CFS have since [the Mt Bold fire] told me that's the most likely thing that will happen, if the wind is anywhere in that quadrant, it will hit the gully and get blown up the gully and it depends on where the wind is as to how quickly it comes up the side. It could be relatively slow compared to the main fire front.

One family was contacted by the CFS soon after moving into the area. This contact was one of the factors that contributed to this household rapidly developing a sense of the high risk of bushfires and the need to be prepared.

> Had a call from local CFS soon after moving in. They knew the property but didn't know that there were new owners. [They] took details of who was living there, updated records which they do every year …[and they] talked out how to reduce fire risk.

This household was also told about Information Nights by the CFS during this visit.

Another interviewee reported participating in an audit of water resources in the district, conducted by the CFS. After this experience, he made a decision to purchase a pump and followed through with this decision. He showed us where he had located the pump.

### Summary: association between informal contact with the fire service and community fire response – pre fire.

- Interviewees contact brigade members:
  - socially
  - as neighbours, and
  - through local businesses
- This contact provided opportunities for raising questions and discussing concerns about fire safety
- CFS phoning community members in order to update their brigade records provided educative opportunities
- Other CFS activities, such as a training event and a water audit, had unintended outcomes of triggering a specific and important fire safety action by a household member.

## Building processes and the CFS

Two people commented on the additional building requirements that flowed from being in a medium to high fire risk area, and on the advice they

received when the CFS attended their property as part of the approval process.

## Expectations of CFS assistance during a fire event

We have reports from 11 interviews on what households expected in terms of assistance from the CFS. As community education staff and others seek to convey to the community the key message that residents should aim to be self sufficient in a fire, it was seen as important to gain some feedback from interviewees as to whether they were 'hearing' this message.

The Table below summarises data from reports from these 11 cases.

**Table 19 Expectations of CFS**

| Category | Expectation | Cases |
|---|---|---|
| A | Would not expect to see CFS | 7 |
| B | Mixed messages in policies | 2 |
| C | Would expect to see them | 3 |

Category A

This is a cluster of 7 cases that indicated that during a fire event they would not expect to see the CFS at their property. Within these 7 cases, 3 households reported that they felt that the CFS would do their best to control the fire within the wider region and would deal with their priorities first. One of these three cases commented:

> Basically …I expect …they would do their best to control it….. I'm not talking about for my house, I'm talking about for Adelaide.

The second case of three reported that

> I just kind of trust that they're dealing with priorities as they see them. And so I understand the hierarchy of planning and disaster response that's there.

The third case of this group suggested:

> There's only a couple of trucks and they can't be in the same place at the same time …It's perfectly logical; they can't promise, they don't have a pecking order; there's probably some targets around the area that they would see as a priority to protect.

Of the remaining 4 cases in this cluster of 7, 2 households recognised that the CFS goes into 'asset protection' (where the CFS concentrates on protecting houses rather than fighting the fire per se)

> If it's a major fire and the fire is such that it can't be controlled, the CFS goes into asset protection which means they go to all the houses, although it depends.

The second case in this group also understood this approach, as exemplified in the following comment:

> They were in asset protection by this stage. They were only saving houses and moving out, which is what you expected.

Of the remaining 2 cases in this cluster of 7, both households indicated that you can't expect to see the CFS and you need to be self-sufficient. One of these two cases in this group explained that

> since the fire, people have been saying, don't rely on the CFS to save you, because they are volunteers for starters, and they have to protect themselves… so you have to be self-sufficient.

The last of the 7 cases also suggested that people need to start looking after themselves and being self sufficient.

> A lot of people are doing that now (getting a pump and fire fighting equipment) to look after themselves rather than depend on the CFS.

Category B

The two cases in Category B indicated that they believed there were mixed messages in policy and guidelines. One of these 2 cases indicated that these mixed messages pertain to the idea of an 'evacuation centre'. The phrase 'evacuation centre' was mentioned at a community meeting during the fire, as people were wondering where the nominated 'evacuation centre was'. This household member suggested that the CFS need to be clearer in their policy messages, that there is no such thing as an evacuation centre in CFS policy. The second case in this group also indicated that the

> CFS can be coy about saying we can't help you… they have started to. But I think they back off from it. It's a hard thing to say to people.

Category C

This is a cluster of 3 cases who suggested that they would expect to be told when to leave a property during a fire.

One of these 3 cases was new to the area and from their short time in the area had had a fair amount of contact with the CFS. This household suggested that

> If it was close to us here, there would have been some sort of fire truck or someone from CFS saying how close the fire is… I'd seek advice from them about: do you think we should go now? They have an actual time when they will come in and forewarn people.'

The second case in this cluster had previously lived in a fire prone area and commented that …

> I'd probably wait for either police or CFS confirmation about whether to stay or whether to go, 'cause I think they are pretty good like that, they go around, from what I've heard with the Mt Bold fire, they get around to everybody.

The third and final case in this cluster who had been living in the area for some time reported that they would rely on either their neighbour or the CFS to notify them of when to leave.

> If there had been any further danger we were fairly confident that if it had broken out again, which we didn't think was likely to happen, somebody (either the CFS or a neighbour on higher ground) would ring us up and tell us to clear off.

### Summary: Expectations of CFS assistance during a fire event

- Seven cases reported that they would not expect to see a fire truck in the event of a fire
- Two of these seven were familiar with the meaning of 'asset protection' as a response strategy
- Three households believed they would be warned by the CFS or the police when to leave their property
- It is emotionally difficult for some members of the fire service to be explicit with members of the public, about the likelihood that they may not receive assistance from the fire service in the event of a fire.

## Impressions of the CFS response to the Mt Bold fire

Where comments were recorded on this matter, we group them systematically below, in the following order:

- Observations of the overall response effort
- Observations about the specific assistance received
- Praise and defence of the CFS
- Criticism received

### Observations of the overall response effort

Seven of the 18 households interviewed commented on their observation of the overall response effort of the CFS on the day of the fire. (There are other comments on more specific means of assistance offered in the subsequent section). We identified three main categories derived from these observations: observations of the resources utilised, their positive comments on the degree of coordination, and on the results which were obtained in the fire response effort. We have created the Table below to represent these clusters, labelling the clusters A, B and C, with three references to each category. Comments from only 7 cases were recorded. However, two interviewees made comments that pertained to two separate categories.

**Table 20 Interviewee observations of the response effort**

| Category | Type | Cases |
|---|---|---|
| A | Extent of resources utilised | 3 |
| B | Degree of co-ordination | 3 |
| C | Results obtained | 3 |

<u>Category A</u>

This is a cluster of three interviewees whose comments on the extent of fire response resources used were reported with some feeling of what seemed like both relief and admiration.

One household noted that they had brought in fire trucks from considerable distance away and were surprised that the trucks could get to the fire so quickly.

The second case in this cluster also mentioned that sheer volume of fire trucks that where present at the fire.

> Coming home we got held up by about 50 CFS trucks and tankers

This household reported very positively how active the CFS were.

The third case in this cluster commented on the number of helicopters and planes that the CFS had made available,

> The planes were wonderful, the planes and the helicopters were just wonderful.

Category B

This is a cluster of three interviewees who emphasised in their comments the degree of co-ordination between trucks, aerial fire fighting operations, and other on ground supports.

The first case in this cluster commented on the co-ordination of the aerial fire fighting operations.

> I was impressed… watching the coordination with the aircraft flying over…..It was a sight to see. They had the big helicopter up high and seeing all of the small aircraft going into the smoke and how they weren't hitting each other, how coordinated, it was fantastic.

The second case in this cluster was equally impressed with the coordination in general:

> It was the way they did the whole thing; it was so coordinated and organised.

The third case was similarly impressed with the overall coordination, and added that the support from the Salvos was a wonderful effort.

> They had the Salvos set up in hours with meals; they fed something like 1,500 fire fighters… I mean, how do you do that with 3 hours notice?

Category C

This is a cluster of three cases where the dominant theme of the positive comments was the results achieved. The first case in this cluster commented at how impressed they were at the CFS ability to save everybody's house.

> We were flabbergasted how bad it was and how they saved everybody's house…….It was amazing the job they did. Some of these places weren't cleared – you could see that by the debris that was left, it was amazing.

The second case in this cluster commented that without the CFS they would not have been able to manage.

> We couldn't have managed without them. They just never stopped. They kept going all night; they were wonderful.

The third case in this cluster commented more globally on the 'fantastic job' in the face of a 'huge fire front.'

## Summary: Observations of the overall response effort

- There was expressed, in these interviews, a sense of:
  - gratitude
  - appreciation, and
  - relief
- Interviewees were impressed with:
  - the extent of resources which were summoned
  - the degree of coordination between the various arms of the response effort, and
  - the results achieved
- Overall there was appreciation of how little property was lost, given the size and speed of the fire.

## Direct CFS Assistance at the household level

Six households reported that during the Mt Bold fire event they received some sort of assistance from the CFS. Three of these 6 received advice from the CFS, while 3 cases were assisted by the CFS controlling fire on their property. These types of assistance identified during the course of the fire have been depicted in the Table below and placed in two categories.

**Table 21 Direct assistance from the CFS**

| Category | Assistance | Cases |
|---|---|---|
| A | Advice given by CFS | 3 |
| B | CFS appliances active on property | 3 |

<u>Category A</u>

This is a cluster of three households who received advice from the CFS.

One of these cases reported that they were told by the CFS to get out of the area they were in. At this time the interviewee was not near her own home, but was assisting someone on a farm, with the fire front heading towards them.

The 2 remaining cases in this cluster were advised by the CFS on safety procedures. One interviewee was advised (after the fire front had passed) to check her roof for embers. This person reported that once the CFS was assured that household members were capable of following out this task, they moved on.

> The guy came in a said …. Make sure you get up into the roof and check for any spots… He said to me, can you do that, and I said yeah, easy… He said well, do that; we are going to move on.'

This household reported that they understood they needed to take responsibility to ensure that they were as prepared as possible, without the assistance of the CFS. While they were reassured by seeing the fire trucks, they understood they were in asset protection mode and could not offer any further assistance.

> ..They were only saving houses and moving out, which is what you expected. You won't hear us say anything but real good things about them, and it's very reassuring to see those trucks I tell ya…

The third case in this cluster were advised by the CFS to stay out of the scrub, as there may be roots burning underneath and the scrub may collapse. This household also reported that they were grateful for the way the CFS were manning the roads.

> The way they spoke to me I thought was with enough feeling to say, this person is worried about their home, but strong enough to say no, you shouldn't be going up there.

Category B

This is a cluster of three households who experienced CFS intervention in managing fire on their property.

After the fire front had passed, one of these two cases had wanted to leave the premises due to certain circumstances. This household reported that

> By 9 they'd arrived .….They had a look around and said, we'll stay here….. They put an appliance here and were more than happy to protect the house…. They said… we'll stop it going through your place…..

The second case in this cluster reported how after the fire they were dealing with burning stumps,

> he (a household member) was pouring water over this stump, the CFS truck came up and blasted water over it.

The third case reported a positive encounter with the CFS, even though the trucks only came to this family's property briefly.

Another case of reported CFS intervention on the property pertained to an attempt to save a prized animal. This intervention was not successful and was criticised by the householder.

## Summary: Direct Intervention of the CFS

- Residents were offered advice and expressions of concern by the CFS during the fire event
- Topics mentioned, all of which were appreciated by residents, were:
  - information about the approaching front
  - advice about embers in roofs
  - advice about road closures
  - advice about the likelihood of burnt tree roots collapsing and creating a hazard, and
  - general expressions of concern and support
- Three households reported appliances working directly on their property
- In two cases this intervention was appreciated and in one was criticized.

## Praise for and defence of the CFS

Among the 18 households, we identified 3 main themes in the comments to do directly with praise of the CFS, as well as accounts where those we interviewed felt obliged to support the CFS in the face of criticism from other community members. These are represented in categories of A, B, and C in the Table below.

**Table 22 Praise for the CFS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | An irreplaceable service; 'only good things to say' [In relation to this fire event and other fire events] | 4 |
| B | Indirect support offered by defending CFS | 2 |

Of the 18 households interviewed we recorded 6 explicit and unqualified examples of praise for the CFS in relation to current and past experience, in relation to their response ability.

<u>Category A</u>

Some of the comments in this cluster were general – such as they were 'great guys', and 'only good things to say about them'. One of these cases wrote a letter to the CFS thanking them for their efforts. Another case in this cluster was also recorded indicating that they would not want to be without the CFS.

> We need them, we love our CFS; they're great guys…. We wouldn't want to be without them…. I say the same; I think they are all wonderful guys, just wonderful.'

A few interviewees also reported that they were not only happy with how the CFS handled the fire response (discussed above), but were also happy with how they have observed the CFS respond to other events. While these interviewees did have other more critical comments about the CFS which

we discuss below, these more critical comments were not to do with their response ability.

One specifically commented on how they were pretty satisfied with the way CFS handles the containment of grass fires within the area.

> …..Every summer there is the odd grass fire that is put out quickly by CFS. CFS are pretty good here. We're happy with how the CFS responded…

Another case in this cluster also commented positively on the CFS ability to respond to a situation.

> … The two fires that I've had personal… acquaintance with, they have been out doing their thing and I take my hat off to them.'

Category B

This cluster contained two cases whose reports to us about what others had said about the CFS, and the reports of their own experience, indicated a strong level of support for the CFS.

One interviewee said that she thought the criticism she was hearing was petty.

The second case in this cluster reported that their neighbours were upset at the lack of attention to their property.

> The neighbours were a bit upset at first because they thought well, where is the CFS?.

The interviewees reporting this did not share this criticism as they understood that the

> CFS couldn't get up there because that's where the fire was; they had to wait.

## Summary: Praise and Defence

- The overwhelming response of the residents was to paint a picture of the professionalism and comprehensiveness of the CFS response
- In 4 instances households suggested that the CFS were an irreplaceable service
- In addition to the Mt Bold fire, households commented that their responsiveness in attending to grass fires and other incidents was remarkable
- Interviewees who had heard criticisms of the CFS from other residents regarded them as unreasonable in the light of what the CFS had accomplished during the event
- In some cases interviewees defended the CFS in their discussions with neighbours and others.

## Criticism of the CFS

Six of the 18 interviewees voiced some criticism of the CFS.

Five of these cases reported that their criticism was toward the CFS as an organisation rather than the way the fire was handled. The sixth case in this cluster reported that their criticism was aimed at the CFS response effort. This household had suffered what was for them the huge loss of a prized animal in distressing circumstances, and were both critical of their own shortcomings as well as those they perceived as attaching to the CFS.

Two interviewees noted that the CFS suffered some 'internal issues'. One of these two cases discussed these internal issues as 'mentalities' which pervade some CFS groups. These 'mentalities' this person 'can not enjoy or like very much'. However this interviewee noted that these states of mind are not necessarily restricted to CFS groups, but are likely to be inherent in volunteer groups in general.

The second case in this cluster noted that

> they have their own internal problems, mainly political; well, they are personnel, rather than political

The remaining 3 cases in this cluster also suggested similar issues, with one household proposing that

> anyone we know who has anything to do with the CFS have always got their fingers burnt …. So it's lots of Chiefs and not enough Indians

The second of these 3 cases suggested that the CFS do tend to look after their own if they can, while the remaining case perceived an 'us and them' attitude and wished there could be a better working relationship between the CFS and local residents.

> I still find there is a mentality of the CFS and the rest of us …It's the culture of the CFS in this particular brigade …. It's become a them and us mentality…as they have perhaps become more advanced or scientific or better trained, the actual CFS people, it's as if, well, we know everything and the actual resident, if he or she has got their wits about them does know, should know more about their little area than somebody who has never been here before. I just wish there could be a better working relationship.

In a laconic way, one household advised us that in their view, while most people have not really said anything negative about the CFS, a view they concurred with, they did feel that the perceived inadequacy of the 'siren and radio warnings, were a fairly big thing.'

## Summary: Criticism

- A few interviewees referred to ‘internal organizational’ issues within the CFS as ‘off putting’
- Some interviewees related stories of people being associated with the fire service ‘getting their fingers burnt’, due to this association
- One resident thought that the ‘internal issues’ were probably similar in many community organizations, particularly ‘volunteer’ organizations
- For one resident the concern was a divide between ‘the brigade’ and ‘community’, an ‘us’ and ‘them’
- These responses from a few contribute to an inference that some community members would be cautious about becoming involved with the fire service
- Problems with CFS initiated warning systems were specifically mentioned.

## Outside brigades lack of local knowledge

Three households interviewed suggested that brigades who were not local, and may lack local knowledge, which could potentially be seen as a concern. All three cases mentioned that the main concern was that non local brigades did not know their way around the area and they tended to become lost and needed to ask for directions.

The first case in this cluster commented that

> The CFS depend on who they see on the road to find out where to go…[that’s] a bit of a worry.

The second case in this cluster mentioned that as these brigades are coming in from other places they are getting lost.

The third case recalled how a group of CFS brigade members came up the hill to their property

> One night they came up the hill; they walked up in the middle of the night. They didn’t know where they were, or how they got up here.. We had to give them directions on how to move through the property…. If they were really under pressure and searching for gates and tracks and things like that, then I think it would be far more important.’

## Summary: Lack of Local Knowledge

- Three households voiced concern that non local brigades appeared to have had
  - inadequate directions
  - inadequate maps, or
  - difficulty following them.

## CFS dedication after the fire

Four cases reported specifically on the attention that the CFS paid to patrolling properties after the fire front had passed.

In one of these 4 cases the household called for assistance. The three remaining cases in this cluster witnessed the CFS patrolling properties in the days following the fire.

The first case in this cluster acknowledged that the CFS put the fire out initially but in some places they had to come back

> They were camping along the road for 3 days.

The second case commended the CFS for remaining after the main fire event was over.

> …The CFS hang around for hours and hours after the whole show has really ended, so you've got to commend them for that … Our Fire Chief, …he was up here every day… .

The final case of this cluster of 3 also commended the CFS for their dedication for patrolling the area for days after the fire

> ….they were just patrolling throughout …they were very good… probably for a week they were coming through 'cause night is the time to see burning stumps

The other case in this section had to call the CFS for assistance and commented that

> …we were still at risk for 2 or 3 days afterwards with little spot fires. Late the day following, we had a fairly major flare-up over here, and we had to call the CFS and they sent the bomber plane again. That was the following day.

## Summary: Dedication after the fire

- The visible presence of the fire service for days after the fire was noticed and appreciated.

## Community members experience of offering help or considering helping the CFS

This next section provides a brief account of residents experience of actually offering help (3 cases) and one resident's more abstract thoughts about doing so.

Of the 18 households interviewed 3 cases reported on their experience of offering help to the CFS.

Of these 3 cases, 2 reported that they offered help during the course of the fire. In both circumstances neither offer of assistance was taken up. However in at least one of these 2 cases, the resident thought their offer was misunderstood.

> We went over to where the CFS station was and said to them, we're here, we have a horse float, we have somewhere safe where we can put animals, can we help anybody, what can we do to help? I think when we went there they thought that we had animals in the float that we were trying to get refuge for, and they said, go and park

> over the other side of the oval and just wait. …. [After some time] I said to [husband] ……I think they've misunderstood what we wanted to do because we didn't have animals in the float, so anyway we left ….

The second case in this 'cluster' also offered help that was not taken up.

> I went down and just asked them, was there anything in particular an untrained person could do to give them a hand with anything? They were pretty busy doing their own thing and a guy said stand over there and someone will come and see you. And well, that never happened, so I figured, oh well, they are all busy.'

This same person talked about attending a meeting well after the fire and expressing an interest in being involved in the development of some locally based group the members of which might assist each other. This person had been in a service club where the members had a process for warning each other in an emergency situation. He thought he would be contacted but quickly reported

> But they are busy doing things all the time and I thought that, well I did expect to get a call but I didn't [get one], and they seemed to be busy doing things anyway, so maybe they need another member in there so they can do something about it.

This resident's issue was not knowing what geographic area would be best – how to draw a boundary around the group rather than his capacity to convene a group, Two things are noteworthy from the comment. One is that the resident himself recognised that resources in this field of community awareness raising are stretched. The second issue of relevance to the issue of understanding community strengthening is the tendency for ordinary people – those without special expertise in fire service operations - to diminish their own expertise.

This interviewee was speaking of bringing together a group of nearby residents who might first look to being an emergency warning group and then perhaps move towards mounting some education sessions together. In this context he said he was an 'untrained person', and that he would not presume to bring people together.

> I'm not going to impose myself on a group of experts when I know nothing by comparison

We regard the issues of how community members might take up a role at the community level as important. In particular we are keen to establish how barriers, both self-imposed and external, might impact on the capacity of community strengthening to play a role in enhancing community safety. We have examined this issue and the notion of 'shared responsibility' in the Discussion section of the first part of this report.

The final case of this section reported the experience of how their assistance was received by the CFS. They commented that they had a vehicle with a water tank and pump on the back and focussed on putting out burning stumps along fence lines. This person had lived in the area for a long time and was knowledgeable about fire fighting and how the CFS operates. He was impressed with the CFS response both to the fire and to the assistance he was providing.

> I'd say they measured up fully to what I'd have expected and I think they gave more than they needed at the time, and I was very impressed with them. They had drinking water for myself and threw out cold water bottles to anyone who needed a drink, they were well prepared for helping others who were helping them, so quite impressed with them.

### Summary: Community experience of offering help or considering help.

- Interviewees provided two accounts of offering assistance which, in the event, were either misunderstood or overlooked
- The tendency for knowledgeable and capable community members to put down their own experience and contribution in the face of perceptions that others hold more expertise, is an issue for further discussion and elaboration
- The third account showed the ability of the fire service to support someone engaged in a demonstrable and visible response effort.

## Strengths and concerns regarding CFS as a 'community institution'.

In this section we examine viewpoints from interviewees about the importance of the CFS as a 'community institution', and its current and possible future directions. The CFS in this role is an important part of the fabric of community safety, both as an ideal and an everyday reality.

The Table below sets out issues interviewees expressed as being uppermost in their minds of the importance of the CFS. These comments are provided as an addition to the critical role played by the CFS in helping people both be safe and feel safe, as discussed above.

**Table 23 Strengths and concerns about the CFS as a 'community institution'**

| Category | Theme | Case |
|---|---|---|
| A | Positive Role Models | 1 |
| B | Capacity in 'non fire' emergency service roles | 3 |
| C | Source of Community Contact and Information | 2 |
| D | Assistance to Communities with property maintenance | 2 |
| E | 'Environmental' threats' to volunteering | 3 |

Five main themes, as described in the above table, were evident in these accounts by interviewees as to their views about the strengths and concerns about the fire service as a community institution. These themes have been coded as A, B, C, D and E. Some cases appear in more than one category.

<u>Category A</u>

The one case in category A felt that the CFS members and organisation are positive role models for children in the community. One particular program

mentioned was Cadets. This person commented particularly on the importance for children of the Cadets attending the school Christmas party.

> Yes, quite an important thing for them and a big thing. I guess a lot of their parents are CFS volunteers and things like that so I've always looked upon the CFS as being a good thing for children.

Category B

The three cases in category B referred to the wider (non-fire) roles taken on by CFS. Two of these three cases mentioned that the CFS attends car accidents. In one of these two cases the household recalled a car accident that occurred near their property.

> The CFS…. first on the scene [by five hours]. They were really good, fantastic.

The other case in this cluster also discussed how in the event of a break-in the CFS would be the first service they would call.

> If I had a break-in here I'd ring the CFS, 'cause the police can't get here or they'd never find it, but [CFS] ….. know who we are so I'd just call them

Category C

The two cases in category C felt that the CFS is a good source of community contact. One interviewee had been a CFS volunteer for many years in the past and commented on the value of the CFS as a way of meeting people.

> … It was great. They were a great bunch of people. In a community you have got to have a way of meeting people, either through the school or through sport or through a service club, yeah terrific and we still keep in touch.'

The other household in this cluster were new to the area and to a rural lifestyle. They appreciated the time and dedication the volunteers in the area committed to the service, and the lengths that were taken to notify them personally of activities that were happening in the area.

Category D

This is a cluster of two cases that emphasised that the CFS were effective in cleaning up properties to reduce fire risk.

One of these two cases recalled a story of an elderly resident who, two days after the Mt Bold fire, started a fire from his ride on mower. Due to the fire there was metal and concrete litter around the property

> so they [CFS) got in after that and cleaned up the site. They couldn't get the old guy to do it until he actually started a fire.

The other case in this cluster also recalled that the CFS do quite a few controlled burn offs within the area including one that occurred on their property.

> The CFS do quite a lot of controlled burn offs. They advertise – don't panic - cause they are doing a burn off. When we got ours done, they told us to ring all of the neighbours.

Implied here is a probably unintended outcome of a mitigation activity, being the opportunity for community members speaking to each other about the burn off.

Category E

Category E comprises 3 cases who spoke to us about their concerns about the viability of the CFS.

These concerns ranged over a broad number of interrelated issues, and were expressed in terms of the high cost of volunteering, difficulties in finding new recruits, and the need for more promotion of the CFS and validation of its role.

Two cases reported their perspective on the difficulty of attracting volunteers, which was due to what they saw as the 'change of culture' within the organisation. One interviewee spoke about how the CFS has gone from a community based organisation to a government based organisation. One driver seemed to be 'accountability': 'you've got to be accountable for everything now.' This interviewee also believed the CFS needs to more publicly promote what they do.

> '[There should be] more public awareness of the CFS. I think they should be promoted a lot more than they are…… If people were more aware of it they would understand a lot of the difficulties that the volunteers face.

The second case also discussed a change of culture, but in this case, the culture referred to was at the societal level, and cited the constant threat of litigation in today's world.

> The litigious environment that we live in now is making people very wary.

This interviewee also commented that younger people are less interested in joining the organisation.

> It doesn't appeal to young people…… a lot of training that they need to know, where going back years ago…. you probably didn't even have to be a member; you'd just go out and help. That was good, because there was more community and there wasn't the……. hierarchical structure that exists now.

A third household implied that to be a volunteer and make it work, it would have to be incorporated into a business life, such as one brigade member was able to do, while also recognising that the volunteering would most likely impact negatively on that brigade member's business.

> The captain supports the brigade to the detriment of his business

The third case in this category was an interviewee who suggested that the CFS needed to more publicly promote what they do. Along similar lines, another interviewee spoke in terms of the role of volunteer as not being validated.

> People have to get something out of it for themselves apart from fighting fires. There has to be some sense of community and being a volunteer is a wonderful thing …….. So yes, I think that sort of aspect needs to be nurtured, to say it's good to be a volunteer

### Summary: Strengths and concerns regarding CFS as a community institution

- Exposure of community members to the CFS in roles other than operational fire response strengthens and widens community members appreciation of the service
- Belonging to the service provides a way of meeting people
- the service is seen as a positive role model for children
- The CFS role in reducing neighbourhood risk by doing controlled burns is appreciated
- Some saw the organizational identity changing from that of a 'community based' organization, to a 'government' organization
- Some were aware of difficulties with recruiting new volunteers, the causes of which were seen to be:
    - an increasingly litigious society
    - a marked increase in training requirements, and
    - the hierarchical structure of the organization
- Some residents would like to see more promotion of the service in general
- Some would like to explore ways of making the role of volunteer less taxing
- Some thought that ways to better integrate the CFS with paid work should be explored

## Agency Environments external to CFS

Interviewees also identified private and public institutions outside of the CFS whose policies and practices were seen to impact on community safety.

Five cases spoke about the impact of maintenance or lack thereof, of properties owned either by Local Government or other Land/Water management agencies. These impacts include the regulation about removal of trees, the maintenance of roadside verges and vegetation build up on Government owned land.

Four of these 5 cases indicated that from their perception the activities undertaken by councils and other public land managers was inadequate and potentially increased the fire risk in the area.

One case reported that the council no longer maintained roadside verges. While residents in some circumstances were able to maintain these themselves, there are many people who did not have the means to do this.

Another interviewee in this cluster reported that public land adjoining his property was not maintained and he actively monitored the maintenance of this property as he felt it was a potential fire threat. Two other cases reported that the council had strict regulations on what they could and could not clear by way of trees. This report was confirmed by another interviewee who was

associated with the council who specified that the council could only cut down a certain number of trees.

One of the five cases reported that the council had implemented water restrictions on the amount of water that could be removed from their privately owned dam. They reported that

> We have to have a licence to take water out of our dam, and they tell us how much we are allowed to take out, and we have to pay for that….. They are going to put a meter in there which we are going to have to pay for. Really, we're not happy, not happy at all. This is all part of the conservation of water and so on ……. They tell you how much you are allowed to take out; it's very encroaching.

The impact of inadequate service by Telstra in relation to the threat of fire, was raised by one interviewee. She reported that in her area the phone lines had been down for 6 weeks and resulted in many residents not having access to landlines during the fire. One interviewee who could not receive mobile calls or text messages in her area, referred to how she is able to get text messages on her CDMA network, but that Telstra was going to 'kill' this network in January 2008.

Another interview talked of what she saw as a harmful policy in relation to the threat of fire, being the ratio of horses per hectare:

> The council say you are only supposed to have 1 horse per 2 hectares or 7 acres or something, which is a load of bullshit. Up here in the Adelaide hills where you've got strong growth in spring, we'd have grass up to our necks out in the paddock if you only had 1 horse per 7 acres and no cattle on the property.

### Summary: Agency environments external to CFS

- Residents noted that a number of private and public organizations were reducing their responsibilities which was impacting on community fire safety
- Examples given were
  - maintenance of roadside verges
  - keeping publicly owned land maintained in such a way as to minimise fire risk, and
  - a decrease in maintenance and coverage by telecommunications services
- Some residents were increasingly vigilant about public land management issues
- One resident was quite agitated about increased risk from lack of attention to fuel suppression
- The regulatory environment was seen as working both in favour of and against increased community safety
- Examples in favour included Local Government and State building regulations
- Examples against included regulations as to how one can use water in dams on private property and regulations about the number of horses

which can be kept per hectare

- These conflicting policy directions were seen to require further attention by community members and regulatory bodies

# Appendix 1: Strahan Survey questions guiding sample selection

| Question # | Written Question | Possible Response |
|---|---|---|
| 1b | Was your home or property threatened by the fire on January 10, 2007 (Mt Bold Fire)? | Yes/No |
| 21 | Which of the following best describes the property you live on? | House on Residential Block<br>Hobby Farm or Small Acreage<br>House on Large Farm<br>Other [specify] |
| 4a | Where did you obtain this information? (following on from question 4, Have you received any information about bushfire safety during the past 12 months) | [Options]<br>Community or Neighbourhood meeting<br>Mail or Letter box<br>Internet or online<br>Programs on TV<br>Radio<br>Newspaper<br>Other<br>[Answer]<br>-Yes<br>-No<br>-Not Sure |
| 7 | Over the last summer the south Australian country fire service provided information about bushfires and how to plan and prepare your property to residents in your area in a number of different ways.<br>During the last summer, did you, or a member of your household, attend a meeting of any of the following? | [Options]<br>Community Fire Safe Group<br>Bushfire Planning Workshop<br>Fire Brigade Challenge Night<br>Bushfire Blitz Meeting<br>Community Hall Bushfire Awareness Meeting<br>Other<br>[Answer]<br>-Yes I did<br>-Yes , Someone else from household did<br>-No one from household Attended<br>-Not Sure |
| 9 | During the last summer, did you see or hear any SA Country Fire Service bushfire safety advertisements on TV or Radio or received any | Yes<br>No<br>Unsure |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | booklets or brochures in the letterbox about bushfire safety? | |

## References

Cheers, B. (2002), The community factor – A critical review of the literature, Centre for Rural and Regional Development, University of South Australia, Whyalla.

DeLaine, D., Probert, J., Goodman, H., Pedler, T and Rowe, C (2008) Fiery Women - Consulting, designing, delivering and evaluating pilot women's bushfire safety skills workshops, Proceeding of AFAC Bushfire Conference, Adelaide 2008

Elsworth, G., Stevens, K., Gilbert, J., Goodman, H., Rhodes, A and Buckle, P. Community Safety In Bushfires In Australia – Foundational And Operational Principles. (unpublished)

Elsworth, G., Anthony-Harvey-Beavis, K., and Rhodes, A (2008). What should community safety initiatives for bushfire achieve? Chapter 13, Handmer, J and Haynes, K. Community Bushfire Safety. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood.

Goodman, H., Healey, L., and Boulet, J. (2007) Community Responses To Bushfires: The Role And Nature Of Systems Of Primary Sociality. New Community Quarterly, 5, (1), 11-25.

Gould, L. J., Stapley, L. F. and Stein, M. (2001) The Systems Psychodynamics of Organizations: Integrating the Group Relations Approach, Psychoanalytic, and Open Systems Perspectives, H. Karnac (Books) Limited, London.

Lowell, R (2006). Localising human services: A history of Local Government Human Services in Victoria. Australian Scholarly. Melbourne.

Nossal, B (2007). “It’s A Dog eat Dog World Out There!” Competition, Collaboration and Consulting”. Conference presentation, ISPSO Conference, http://www.ispso.org/Symposia/Amsterdam/Abstract%20Nossal%202006.pdf; accessed 5th May 2009.

Rowe, C., Goodman, H., (2008) Interim descriptive report_womens skills survey responses. Internal Report to Rural Solutions / Country Fire Service, South Australia. April.

South Australian State Emergency Service newsletter, SES Support at Mt Bold Fires 10TH - 13TH January 2007, available at: http://www.ses.sa.gov.au/newmedia/incidents/mt-bold-fires-2007.asp, Accessed 3 October 2007