

Waroona Bushfire Inquiry
Level 6 Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

13th February 2016

Dear Mr Ferguson

Re: CAPS Submission to the Waroona Fires Inquiry

Thank you for receiving our submission to the Waroona Fires Inquiry which is attached to this letter. We understand the Inquiry seeks to understand how the Government of Western Australia can 'protect the W.A. community and assets it values' through actions that will arise from this Inquiry. We feel impelled to provide a submission due to the unique and highly political nature of the circumstances impacting the Yarloop area prior to, during and now after the fire on January 7th, 2016.

Our authority to provide a submission rests on our ongoing involvement with, and representations of many residents of, Yarloop since the early 2000s when the still running conflict with Alcoa Wagerup and the state Government commenced. CAPS – Community Alliance for Positive Solutions - is a local group of concerned residents in Yarloop who have over the years been able to influence Alcoa's licence conditions and Government policies to increase the protection of local people and the environment. To do this we have worked closely with all tiers of Government and as appropriate with key people in the Alcoa Wagerup management team.

We submit that the question posed but not yet answered as to the future of Yarloop is indicative of a broader political context that sets the response to the fire at Yarloop in special circumstances. The circumstances of this fire are very different to any others before it and we seek to make the Inquiry aware of the issues which may have had some bearing on the subsequent fate of Yarloop. Further to our submission we offer a set of recommendations:

Recommendations

1. We request that the Inquiry's Terms of Reference be extended to sufficiently explore and address the issues as raised in the submission. We expect this might involve a process of requiring key people to be subpoenaed to obtain evidence and local knowledge.
2. Further, we request a meeting to provide a briefing in person with yourself to ensure you are fully informed of the historical, political and current situation which existed prior to the fire, and which continues to influence the aftermath response.
3. The Yarloop/Hamel/Waroona locality should have an integrated industry/community fire strategy to avoid conflicts of interests over resources between industry and communities.
4. We contend that the town of Yarloop should be treated as a unique circumstance due to the co-location of a major industrial complex which was already having a range of adverse impacts on the town.
5. This uniqueness needs to require of government authorities a re-doubling of efforts to ensure Yarloop is not in any way disadvantaged BECAUSE of Alcoa's proximity and property interests in the town.
6. Yarloop is also unique because, among many other qualities, it is a heritage town, with buildings lost to the fire which were of national significance. While individual properties owners will make their own decisions re whether to re-build or not, we contend that the Government has an obligation to re-build the town's infrastructure and heritage buildings.
7. Further, we think Alcoa Wagerup as a commercial entity, in deciding to not re-build the houses it owns, is making a decision in its interests at the cost of the collective community asset. The community asset should not be left in such an exposed state to commercial interests, this being possible due to the Government's failure to formally install an industrial buffer around the refinery at Wagerup. This matter has to be part of the forward considerations of who is responsible for the 'protection of the W.A. community and assets it values'.

8. Finally, we recommend that the people of Yarloop are enabled to be involved in all decisions which affect their town as it is likely that a range of strategies and options will be needed to respect all interests.
9. To this end an independent party who is able to work with the community is needed to ensure the top down approach of Government (and Alcoa Wagerup) does not continue the pre-fire history of Yarloop.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to meeting with you, to speak to you further about the matters raised in the submission and the recommendations.

Yours sincerely

Vince Puccio

Merv McDonald, AFSM

Co-Chairs: Community Alliance for Positive Solutions Inc.

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