

Submission to:

Ross Thornton – President Denmark Bush Fire Advisory Committee  
Greg Harwood – Director of Community & Regulatory Services  
Shire Councillors  
FESA Officer

30-06-2010

Shire of Denmark  
ICR1061799

30 JUN 2010  
FIRE 1

DATE	LPH
FILE REF	
OPEN	
DIR of FINANCE	
DIR of PLANNING	
DIR of INFRASTRUCTURE	
DIR of COMMUNITY	✓
OTHER	

Attention Ross Thornton: In reference to your undertaking at the March 27<sup>th</sup> council forum, to raise this issue at the next Bush Fire Advisory meeting, this submission will hopefully be of some use.

Principals for private sector machinery support in the event of bush fire and how to establish a tender of preferred contractors.

There is an opportunity for the Council to provide the community with better bush fire security through calling for tenders from local contractors to provide dozers and heavy duty loaders including a driver, for bush fire suppression within the Denmark Shire and adjoining lands in forthcoming fire seasons.

Contractors should state:

- Machines available
- Capacity to transport the dozer/loader to bush fire
- An hourly rate while the machine is involved in suppression
- A standby rate while on site if needed
- Also on very high or extreme fire danger days, the contractor is to provide a standby hourly rate to ensure the low loader is on the same work site as the dozer/heavy loader to allow for rapid arrival at the bush fire if called.

The contractors who provide tenders must have equipment suitable for bush fire suppression.

1. Fitted with front and rear lights
2. Fire extinguishers
3. Preferably an air conditioned cab (not essential)
4. Clean engine compartment to avoid indrawn sparks risking onboard fires

All tenders that satisfy the required criteria will be accepted onto the preferred contractors list and notified as a preferred suppression contractor to be called on in the event of a bush fire. This information will also be passed on to DEC Walpole and Albany, the Albany FESA office and the Albany and Mt Barker Shires. On very high or extreme fire danger days, arrangements will be made with one of the contractors to be on standby with a low loader on the same site as the dozer/heavy loader, and ready to go in the event of fire.

As has been demonstrated on numerous occasions rapid response with effective suppression equipment is the only reliable way along with some prescribe burning adjacent to housing or mulching if funding is available to provide the Denmark community and surrounding settlements with efficient bush fire security.

High quality surveillance is also a vital aspect of suppression as yet unexplored; within the coal industry for example fire surveillance is far more advanced with a computer operated camera revolving every 3 minutes and the computer alerting staff if fire starts. This technology could be used here in Denmark; on top of Mt Shadforth a camera could feed information to a FESA office at the Council.

With high quality surveillance and rapid response with a dozer/heavy loader arriving at the bush fire along with the brigades, before these fires gain strength is the only way to save lives and property in severe weather conditions.

Our present emphasis on prescribe burning our reserves will be of little use on severe and extreme fire days, as was demonstrated with the DEC prescribe burn in Sheepwash Block which carried a wild fire 3 months later from an escaped prescribe burn coming from the adjacent Denbarker Block this fire jumped the Denbarker road travelled the full length of the 3 month old prescribe burn in Sheepwash Block then on through to Redmond farmland (dates and times of the above are available)

There is another example of a wild fire well known to those in the Harewood Mt Lindsey area that very nearly got into the Denmark River Reserve near Thornton's property with northerly winds and 35deg temperatures.

This fire was from a DEC (then CALM) burn escape on Mt Lindsey, quickly gaining strength in these severe weather conditions, the brigades and DEC trucks managed to hold the fire when it entered Thornton's cleared paddocks. However a section of the Denmark River Reserve adjoined DEC land and required a dozer or heavy loader, nothing was on site until a farmer with suitable equipment and aware of the severity of the situation arrived, without being called by FESA, and managed to construct a fire break to separate these reserves and hold the fire at this point using a blade and onboard water, Ross Thornton is very familiar with this event (and again dates and times are available)

The prescribe burn plan adopted by Council and FESA has useful elements within it, for example reducing fuel adjacent to housing in strategic areas, creating low fuel corridors in some of our reserves that are a threat to our community in severe weather conditions.

However there is a major flaw in the plan that senior planning persons should be aware of or be prepared to investigate. That is the phenomenon that long unburnt reserves can achieve declining fuel levels in the Southwest of W.A which is well known to many.

With this knowledge it is therefore extremely unwise to burn some of these forests that have been without fire for 30 – 70 years have been through the heavy understory period and are now developing an open floor character with declining litter/fuel levels.

By prescribe burning these reserves we are simply propagating massive understory seed laying idol at present, resulting in rapidly increasing fuels requiring ongoing prescribe burning or having to wait until the forest regains its declining litter/fuel levels up to 25 to 35 years later.

It would be extremely valuable to establish the fire history of our reserves, with the long unburned reserves inspected by a small committee comprising FESA personnel, Denmark environment centre and an NRM officer helping to create some balance in this issue.

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Background:

Member of the East Denmark Bush Fire Brigade since 1970

Designer and builder of Heavy Duty Self Accessing Fire Fighting Machine