

Supplementary Questions

1. Can you outline the way your council spends and receives money for rural firefighting, including equipment, premises and hazard reduction. Please include flow charts and note if there are any out-of-pocket expenses.

Gwydir Shire Council only receives money towards hazard reduction remediation, and any additional out-of-pocket expenses are absorbed by council. Premises are funded by grants and claims are made for expenditure. Council's concern is the large time cost of working on RFS assets, when our time could be better utilised working on Councils own assets.

2. Does your council experience any unnecessary administration, duplicate processes, confusion, or waste as part of its operations related to the assets, premises, and funding of the NSW Rural Fire Service? If so, can you provide specific examples.

Yes, our council encounters a significant amount of uncertainty and duplicate handling in the administration of RFS transactions.

RFS procurement process in Gwydir Shire Council:

1. The invoice is received by our creditors department. It is scanned and sent to engineering business support.
2. Business support enters the invoice into an RFS expenditure summary spreadsheet and forwarded to RFS for approval to pay.
3. On receipt of approval to pay a purchase order is written then sent for approval to the director engineering services.
4. Once the purchase order is approved, the invoice is goods receipted, the spreadsheet is updated, and the goods receipt is returned to the creditor's department.
5. Creditors process the invoice.

This is a time-consuming process and the RFS also find it much easier if they could pay invoices themselves.

3. What were your council's costs (direct and indirect) to maintain rural firefighting equipment and buildings for the 2023 and 2024 financial years?

4. How much funding did your council receive in the 2023 and 2024 financial years, for maintaining rural firefighting equipment and buildings?

5. For the 2023 and 2024 financial years, if your council was out of pocket for any rural firefighting costs, how much was it out of pocket for these periods.

6. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART) reviewed the rate peg methodology in 2023. Following the review, IPART has introduced a council-specific emergency services levy (ESL) factor. The ESL factor is intended to allow councils to fully

recover the annual increases in emergency service contributions without diverting funds required to maintain service levels and infrastructure for their communities. • What is your council's opinion on this change and its effectiveness?

7. Some councils have suggested a broad-based property levy as a replacement for the ESL. From your council's experience would this significantly change the financial burden on your ratepayers?

8. Does your council conduct a stocktake of 'red fleet' vehicles and a condition assessment of their written down value?

Council does not currently have the resources to conduct a full stocktake of red fleet assets. We rely on data that the RFS have in their possession and are then tasked with annually updating our asset register to match. We have an enormous amount of difficulty extracting this information from the RFS, and we cannot verify the accuracy. The opportunity for fraud surrounding red fleet is very high.

9. If your council conducts a stocktake, does the NSW RFS provide the asset listing used for the stocktake? From your experience is the listing accurate?

The list provided by the RFS varies in accuracy; vehicle details can be vague, and supporting evidence of acquisition or disposal is non-existent. In one instance, we received data that was three years out of date, and when queried with the RFS, we were told it was the most recent information available. There is little to no corroboration with the annual RFS allocation letter.

10. Has your council purchased or provided land for rural firefighting purposes. If so, how was the land purchase funded and was the council or ratepayer out of pocket for this? Please quantify if possible.