

**Submission
No 21**

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

Name: Mr Stephen Wallace

Date received: 31/01/2014

I am a Volunteer Rural Fire Fighter of Fringe Brigade Coonabarabran. I work full time as a Child Protection Caseworker for FACS. I have over forty years welfare experience in various fields. I catch and remove venemous snakes from around Coonabarabran and release them in the Pilliga Forest and also in the Warrumbungle National Park. I have acted as a local guide for fire fighting strike teams when in the National Park and pilliga Forest due to my extensive knowledge of the region. I was inside the firestorm along Morrisseys Rd, Hawkers Lane and Guinimar Rd. The sides of the mirrors on our truck began to melt. I have a fire visor on my helmet. Despite this the glue in my goggles over my eyes melted. In saving homes along Hawkers Rd I couldn't see fellow firefighters only twenty yards away. Winds were gusting at times to over 160kl.

Recently I attend a reunion of the first anniversary of the Wambelong Fire. I was shocked at the emotional and psychological fragility of National Park Workers. They feel the unspoken and sometimes outright blame of community hostility over the fire that occurred. As a fellow firefighter I observed their tireless, fearless and ongoing efforts to fight the fire over many weeks, battling fatigue, exhaustion and worried about their own families and homes whilst out fighting the fire. As an experienced welfare worker I am alarmed at the extent of emotional damage these folks are now carrying. I cannot emphasise enough I have grave fears at this time.

My submission is that all National Park Persons should now receive compulsory group and individual counselling work. I would boldly suggest Steve Hall a Senior Chaplain of the SES as a preliminary first step. This may need more qualified assistance at a later date.

Should you have further questions please contact me.