Conceptualizing the State’s Response to Natural Disasters

Dr Richard Phillips
“Governing is not easy, it’s about making the difficult decisions, to keep our State strong, secure and prosperous, so we can secure a better future for WA Families.”

COLIN BARNETT | Premier of Western Australia
What’s the Problem?
What We Did
Resilience

Well our charter is to build community resilience before, during and after a fire event. So we're meant to be developing all of the tools and processes to assist our volunteers to engage in their communities...That will help bring on the most, quickest recovery.

CRCNSWST 06 [Rural Fire Service]
Resilience

I think that what we appear to be doing is telling more and instructing more and giving the community more. Our idea is to make them more self-reliant, but in fact we are making them more reliant, by giving them more stuff.

CRCVICST 04 [Country Fire Authority]
Authority

There are four recognised fire authorities in New South Wales: National Parks and Wildlife, State Forests, Fire and Rescue NSW (urban service) and the Rural Fire Service. They are all recognised under the Rural Fires Act. Everybody does their own thing until we get significant fire. [Then] the Fire Commissioner takes charge of that fire and appoints someone to discharge his responsibilities of managing that fire.

CRCNSWST 01[RFS]
Authority

I’m trying to bring about some organisational change and cultural change. Because the traditional environment is a quasi-military structure, very strong authority gradient, very much about command and control in information going up and down the line and being approved.

CRCNSWST 10 [RFS]
Responsibility

To mitigate bushfire threat it has to be a joint community, fighting agency, even broader community commitment strategy. It can’t be just reliant on one or the other.

CRCNSWST 05 [Fire and Rescue NSW]
Responsibility

You always ask yourself am I going to be good enough for this? Will I be able to respond in time? Will I keep people safe? It’s a big thing…people have to put their hand up to help in this role; it’s two-way. People have to prepare…That’s that shared responsibility that we need- people like me with that other experience need to step up, but it’s fragile. If a lot of people get matted [criticised], people will just go away.

CRCWAST 10 [DEC]
Expectations

There’s now an expectation that the state will look after me which wasn’t there, certainly when I was a younger person. I wasn’t expecting the state to provide for me.

CRCVICST 01 [Policy]
Expectations

I think the amount of communication that we do and the timing of that is becoming more critical and the expectations that we deliver are becoming more critical. If we don’t, the vulnerability of us being, from a management point of view, being exposed to liability if we don’t communicate things well…it’s getting more rigorous I think trying to work through this.

CRCWAST 06 [DEC]
Conclusions
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The State and Wildfire