

# Special inquiry into January 2016 Waroona fire, Western Australia

WHEN:  
NSW - 3 AUGUST 2016  
SA - 4 AUGUST 2016  
TAS - 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

COST:  
\$150

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In early January 2016 a major bushfire swept down from the Darling Escarpment and across the farms of the Swan Coastal Plain. The fire had a severe impact on the settlements of Waroona, Yarloop, Preston Beach and surrounding areas.

Euan Ferguson was appointed by the Government of Western Australia to conduct the review into the fires. *Reframing Rural Fire Management: Report of the Special Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire* was tabled in Parliament on Thursday 23 June 2016. The review examined the effectiveness of preventative measures, the response by firefighters and the warning and support of people affected by the fire. The report proposes 17 'Recommendations for Strategic Change' and 23 'Agency Opportunities for Improvement' to enhance Western Australia's response to bushfire. The WA Government will formally respond to the recommendations by September.

Mr Ferguson's presentation puts the spotlight on the current and future arrangements for managing rural fire in Western Australia. The presentation of the *Report of the Special Inquiry* will hold interest for field and centrally based fire managers, emergency management policy makers at local and state government levels and for leaders from community and industry.



## About Euan Ferguson

Euan Ferguson is a trained forester. He is a former Chief Officer of Victoria's Country Fire Authority and a former Chief Officer and CEO of South Australia's Country Fire Service. He is also past President of AFAC and past Chair of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre.

The report describes the Waroona fire response as:

*"At best 'disjointed and disconnected', at worst 'dysfunctional and broken'."*

The Special Inquiry process presents ample evidence that "the current system ... is failing volunteers, citizens and government".

The Special Inquiry, followed a systems approach and, to the greatest degree possible, avoided the apportioning of blame. The key issues and challenges that have been identified include:

- fuels management;
- warnings;
- traffic management;
- incident management;
- and the effectiveness and efficiency of resources on the fireground.

The report evaluates institutional options and barriers and proposes the establishment of a Rural Fire Service in order to build rural fire management capability in the State. It also makes recommendations for transition to recovery.

It concludes that there needs to be a shift in thinking in Western Australia towards more resources for fuel management, building self-reliance and community capacity and greater emphasis on distributed leadership and empowerment of community leaders.