



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Brendan Smyth MLA (Chair), Mary Porter AM MLA (Deputy Chair), Nicole Lawder MLA,  
Yvette Berry MLA

## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Review of Auditor-General's Report No. 5 of 2013: *Bushfire Preparedness*

Responses to QToN at public hearing of 9 September 2014





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Yvette Berry MLA

**Review of Auditor-General's report No. 5 of 2013: *Bushfire Preparedness***  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**9 September 2014**

Asked by BRENDAN SMYTH MLA:

In relation to:

- (a) Why is it that it is only recently that the MOU was signed – why were previous iterations of the draft MOU (post the signed November 2007 version) not signed?
- (b) Noting the Auditor-General's comment (p. 18 of Audit report)—why was there a disagreement between the two parties to the MOU in reaching a formal agreement on interagency co-operation through the review and signing of the MOU? [this supplementary Q to the signing of the MOU was asked later in the hearing]



SHANE RATTENBURY MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

- (a) The Memorandum of Understanding and Access Agreement between Territory and Municipal Services and the ACT Emergency Services Agency outlines the agreed arrangements for bushfire preparedness and response between Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) and the Emergency Services Agency (ESA). The MOU is a mature document and TAMS and ESA both agreed that the document did not need to be signed on an annual basis (for the period 2007-08 to 2012-13) where no change to its content was necessary.
- (b) Changes to the body of the MOU were agreed as necessary and signed by both agencies on 24 October 2013. Prior to this signing a number of drafts were circulated and considered by both agencies as noted in the Auditor General's report on page 18.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Signature:

Date:

18/9/14

By the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Shane Rattenbury MLA





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**Review of Auditor-General's report No. 5 of 2013: *Bushfire Preparedness***  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**9 September 2014**

Asked by MR BRENDAN SMYTH MLA:

In relation to:

With regard to funding for the TAMS Bushfire Operations Plan, could the committee be provided with information for each reporting period commencing in 2010–11 to current on: (i) how much money was appropriated; (ii) what it was spent on; and (iii) what was achieved?

MR SHANE RATTENBURY MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

Information on appropriation, expenditure and achievements is provided at **Attachment A** for the 2010-11 through 2013-14 financial years.



Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Signature:

Date:

14/10/14

By the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Shane Rattenbury MLA

**2010-2011**

The Directorate recognised recurrent and capital expenditure totalling \$8.833m for the Fire Management Unit which is responsible for the delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan, this included \$2.641m on employee expenses, \$5.738m on non employee expenses and \$0.454m on capital works.

This expenditure was funded by the recognition of \$6.131m in actual GPO and Capital appropriation and other sources of funding including: independent revenue; grants; fire insurance funding; insurance reimbursements from ACTIA; and reimbursement of fire deployment costs.

Delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan is complemented by capital works and other services delivered by other businesses, such as amenity mowing in urban areas, however these costs are not included in the Bushfire Operations Plan due to their incidental nature.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Work Undertaken</b>
<b>Fuel Management Activities</b>	
Grazing	A total of 7,441 hectares were grazed.
Physical Removal	The BOP identified 44 separate activities covering approximately 554 hectares, all of which were completed.
Prescribed Burning	A total of 4,217 Ha of prescribed burns were programmed of which 1,440 hectares were completed. The forest fuels were too wet throughout the season to undertake some of the larger prescribed burns before the onset of winter.
Slashing	All BOP slashing was completed, totalling 7,562 Ha.
Chemical Application	A total of 50 hectares were chemically treated representing 100% of BOP activities.
<b>Access Management</b>	
Maintenance	Over 326 km of fire trails across Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park and the forestry plantations in Kowen, Pierces Creek and Uriarra received routine maintenance. Three of the programmed tasks were deferred to the 2011-12 BOP with an additional 12 roads added to the 2010-11 BOP due to a needs re-assessment during the year
Upgrade of Fire Trails	6 km of fire trails were completed in the 2010/11 program and a further 13 kilometres of work commenced but was not completed. Nine remaining upgrades were rolled into the 2011-12 BOP. Delays to program due to storm damage to the fire trails requiring urgent repairs.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	A total of 34 activities were identified – of these 28 were either completed or commenced before the end of June 2011. The remaining activities were no longer required.
Storm Damage	The TAMS 2010-11 BOP was amended in response to heavy rainfall and storm events experienced late 2010 and early 2011. 19 activities were placed into the amended BOP to repair damage caused by the storms.
Infrastructure	Fire infrastructure development involves the construction or development of features or facilities that assist fire suppression and other fire management activities. Activities completed in the BOP include identifying and purchasing signposting for main trails, helipad maintenance, maintenance of existing water points and the construction of fuel management grazing infrastructure. 21 of the 22 activities were completed with the remaining activity commenced.

Equipment Acquisitions	Fire fighting equipment is regularly replaced to ensure optimum performance, particularly personal protective equipment. TAMS purchased 'slip on' water tanks for 4WD vehicles to augment fire fighting capacity. Remote fire fighting equipment was purchased including portable pumps, fuel containers, lay flat hose and water thieves. The purchase and installation of Automatic Vehicle Location equipment in TAMS owned fire vehicles was deferred to the 2011/12 BOP.
Training	98% of all scheduled training was completed.
Auditing and Monitoring	<p>As part of ongoing quality assurance, TAMS undertakes specific audits on grazing, fire equipment and appliances, fuel hazard assessments, radio communications, fire trails and emergency vehicle access to the estate. These audits help to determine work programs for the following year's BOP or immediate works required prior for the fire season.</p> <p>In the 2010/11 fuel hazard assessment program included 2,040 assessments from over 680 plots. The data analysed informs priorities in the development of subsequent years' BOPs. Of the 16 activities identified in the BOP, 15 were completed. The fire severity mapping following significant prescribed burns activity was cancelled due to inclement weather.</p>
Planning and Research	29 activities were undertaken including activities such as developing guidelines for future tree planting, concept plans for bushfire protection in the Molonglo Valley and the finalisation of approvals for the upgrade of the Stockyard Spur fire trail and walking track.
Education	All scheduled activities completed including the making available of BOP related information on the TAMS website.
Response and Standby	Parks and Conservation staff performed fire standby duties on seven days throughout the season and there were no reported fires.
Seasonal Crew and Plant	Parks and Conservation staff employed 12 seasonal fire fighters from October 2010 to June 2011 as well as contracting two bulldozers and a grader for over three months during the fire season. The seasonal resources were used to implement fuel and access management activities.

## 2011-2012

The Directorate recognised recurrent and capital expenditure totalling \$9.134m for the Fire Management Unit which is responsible for the delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan, this included \$2.960m on employee expenses, \$5.542m on non employee expenses and \$0.632m on capital works.

This expenditure was funded by the recognition of \$7.234m in actual GPO and Capital appropriation and other sources of funding including: independent revenue; grants; fire insurance funding; insurance reimbursements from ACTIA; and reimbursement of fire deployment costs.

Delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan is complemented by capital works and other services delivered by other businesses, such as amenity mowing in urban areas, however these costs are not included in the Bushfire Operations Plan due to their incidental nature.

The 2011/12 fire season developed along similar lines to that experienced in 2010/11 – wetter than average rainfall at regular intervals maintaining high soil moistures and delaying the onset of any level of vegetation curing. These conditions, together with cool temperatures experienced generally over the 2011/12 summer period resulted in very low levels of fire danger and no fire standby required.

Activity	Work Undertaken
Fuel Management Activities	
Grazing	Strategic grazing covered over 7309 ha across 76 different sites. Grass curing rates did not exceed approx. 60% during the season and so did not pose a significant fire threat.
Physical Removal	43 separate activities covering approximately 384 hectares were scheduled with only one activity not completed.
Prescribed Burning TAMS	A total of 52 burns across 5316 ha were scheduled with 26 burns covering 234 ha completed. Eight burns planned for 2012/13 were brought forward into the program as high moisture contents made forest burns impossible. Constant regular rainfall patterns experienced over 2011/12 restricted the ability to fully implement the programme.
Prescribed Burning RFS	A total of 19 separate burns covering 231 ha were set aside for the volunteers with a completion of seven burns (63 ha) and the commencement of another 3 burns covering 121 ha. 2011/13 was the first year that TAMS managed land was available for the RFS Volunteers to undertake prescribed burning.
Slashing	An extensive slashing/mowing program was identified in the 2011/12 BOP covering 207 separate activities across 8,082 ha including slashing undertaken by City Services for primarily amenity purposes.
Chemical Application	Three areas of vegetation re-growth required follow up chemical application all were completed.
Access Management	Over 523 km of fire trails in 53 separate locations were prioritised for attention. Excessive wet weather prevented much of the programme being completed, with many roads becoming impassable following the March 2012 storm event.
Maintenance	The BOP identified 37 activities of maintenance across 295 km. A total of 26 activities across 157 km were completed and another nine (113 km) were commenced.
Upgrade of Fire Trails	Over 13 separate activities across 66 km of existing fire trails were identified as requiring an upgrade to either tanker road standard or float road standard. A total of two activities (4 km) were completed and work commenced on another 60 km of trails.

	Wet weather considerably reduced the operating window for upgrade works.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	162 km of trail side work covering three separate locations.
Storm Damage	The ACT suffered a major storm event in March 2012. The ensuing damage to river crossings, fire trails and culverts undid much of the repair work completed after the 10/11 rainfall events. All high priority repairs were completed with ongoing damage assessment and repair continued into 2012/13.
Infrastructure	This activity was predominantly focussed around grazing however it also included some helipad construction and radio system updates. A total of 15 activities were identified in the BOP of which 13 were completed and 2 were commenced. Several of the tasks not completed involved enlarging farm dams – which were at full capacity making upgrade work impossible.
Equipment Acquisitions	10 separate equipment purchases/upgrades were identified and completed.
Training	A total of 1,888 person days were allocated to training across 61 separate activities with 91% of all programmed activities completed.
Auditing and Monitoring	11 activities including self audits of the key system, effectiveness of grazing burns, and slashing were identified and completed.
Planning and Research	This area covered a broad range of activities (38 in total). It covered more than 500 staff days – only four of these activities were not commenced as a result of limited access from the storm event.
Education	Three activities included working with the RFS on talking to rural lease holders and placing the year's BOP on the TAMS web site. All three activities were completed.
Response and Standby	One day of dedicated standby for resources outside of normal working hours and minimal response activities were logged for the entire season.
Seasonal Crew and Plant	All the seasonal recruits and seasonal plant were engaged and utilised fully throughout the year. Contracts for the seasonal dozer and grader have been updated and renewed for another three years and tenders are currently being sought.
Unforseen	An additional 16 fuel management activities covering 106 ha were implemented during the year.

### 2012-2013

The Directorate recognised recurrent and capital expenditure totalling \$15.357m for the Fire Management Unit which is responsible for the delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan, this included \$3.938m on employee expenses, \$8.707m on non employee expenses and \$2.712m on capital works.

This expenditure was funded by the recognition of \$8.061m in actual GPO and Capital appropriation and other sources of funding including: independent revenue; grants; fire insurance funding; insurance reimbursements from ACTIA; and reimbursement of fire deployment costs.

Delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan is complemented by capital works and other services delivered by other businesses, such as amenity mowing in urban areas, however these costs are not included in the Bushfire Operations Plan due to their incidental nature.

The ACT had experienced two years in succession of wetter than average conditions resulting in very high soil moisture and heavy vegetation growth, particularly in grassland areas. Predictions were for a fire season in 2012/13 of above average potential across, particularly in grassland dominated environments.

The Fire Management Unit prepared the 2012/13 BOP with this in mind and continually assessed the prevailing weather conditions throughout the 2012/13 year. The yearly result reflects a high investment in reducing fuels along the western urban interface, particularly in that area's grassy woodland habitats.

Activity	Work Undertaken
Fuel Management Activities	
Grazing	Strategic grazing covered over 7000 ha across 79 different sites. Grazing was completed standard) at 73 locations and it was deemed as not required at 6 locations.
Physical Removal	15 separate activities covering 140 hectares were scheduled with 13 activities completed.
TAMS Prescribed Burning	The prescribed burning programme for 2012/13 covered 42 burns across 12,450 Ha. A risk based assessment, considering all deferred burns from the previous two years, refocused efforts to maximise strategic fuel management outcomes. All burns required were completed. The burn program delivered was the largest in recent history delivered by TAMS.
RFS Prescribed Burning	12 separate burns covering 159 ha were set aside for the volunteers. Six of these burns covering 32 ha were completed.
Slashing	212 separate activities covering over 8,000 ha including slashing undertaken by City Services for primarily amenity purposes were completed and met the required standards.
Chemical Application	All five activities covering 60 ha were completed.
Access Management	In 2012/13, over 744 km of fire trails in 78 separate locations were prioritised for attention. Many of these roads, or roads leading to these locations, were damaged in the storm events of 2012.
Maintenance	The BOP identified 41 activities of maintenance across 440 km. A total of 35 of these activities were completed. Due to wet weather towards the end of the year, six of the tasks were carried over.
Upgrade of Fire Trails	15 separate activities across 39 km of existing fire trails were prioritised for upgrade, with 13 activities completed and two deferred to next year due to wet weather limitations.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	13 of the programmed 22 activities designed to manage overgrowth of road-side vegetation was completed. A further nine tasks were deferred to 2013/14 as the required machinery (sourced from Victoria) became unavailable.
Infrastructure	A total of 19 activities were identified in the BOP of which 17 have been completed. Due to wet weather towards the end of the year, two tasks were deferred to 2013/14.
Equipment	Equipment purchases and PPE appropriation were ongoing.

Acquisitions	
Training	Over 986 person days allocated to training across 43 separate courses. A total of 38 courses were completed and two courses were in the process of being delivered.
Auditing and Monitoring	There were 12 separate activities including audits of the key system, grazing, burns, and slashing. All activities were completed.
Planning and Research	This section included a total of 47 activities allocating 530 staff days. A total of 40 activities were completed, whilst seven relate predominantly to the development of concept plans.
Education	There were three activities under this section including working with the RFS on liaising with rural lease holders and placing the BOP on the TAMS web site. All three were completed.
Response and Standby	There were 54 days of stand up this reporting year and five days of total fire ban.
Seasonal Crew and Plant	This year the BOP identified eight separate activities around the engagement and training of seasonal employees and equipment - all of which were completed.
Unforseen	There were three requests from Victoria for assistance with fire fighting efforts, with TAMS contributing three RFS deployments (23 staff).

#### 2013-2014

The Directorate recognised recurrent and capital expenditure totalling \$10.501m for the Fire Management Unit which is responsible for the delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan, this included \$4.270m on employee expenses, \$6.231m on non employee expenses.

This expenditure was funded by the recognition of \$6.202m in actual GPO and Capital appropriation and other sources of funding including: independent revenue; grants; fire insurance funding; insurance reimbursements from ACTIA; and reimbursement of fire deployment costs.

Delivery of the Bushfire Operations Plan is complemented by capital works and other services delivered by other businesses, such as amenity mowing in urban areas, however these costs are not included in the Bushfire Operations Plan due to their incidental nature.

Activity	Work Undertaken
Fuel Management Activities	
Grazing	Strategic grazing covered over 6,500 ha across 77 different sites in the 2013/14 period. Grazing was completed (met the standard) at 76 locations and it was deemed as not required at one location.
Physical Removal	18 separate activities covering approximately 64 hectares of physical removal were scheduled with 15 of these activities completed and the remainder re-assessed as not required.
TAMS Prescribed Burning	The prescribed burning programme covered 47 burns across 6,476 ha. 29 of the burns were completed, a further 13 were not required. Five burns were held over to 14/15 BOP due to weather considerations.
RFS Prescribed	A total of 18 separate burns covering 196 ha of TAMS managed land were set aside

Burning	for RFS volunteers. RFS records indicate that 6 (33%) of these burns were completed.
Slashing	An extensive slashing/mowing program was planned involving 215 separate activities covering over 8,000 ha and including areas undertaken by City Services for primarily amenity purposes, were completed and met the required standards.
Chemical Application	There were 5 activities in the 2013/14 BOP that covered 19 ha and all work was completed.
Access Management	
Maintenance	The BOP identified 32 maintenance activities across 280 km. A total of 25 of these activities were completed; six were not required due to the roads being in good condition and one activity was deferred to the 2014/15 BOP.
Upgrade of Fire Trails	Six activities across 31 km of existing fire trails were identified as requiring an upgrade to either tanker roads or float roads. Five of these activities were completed with the remaining activity not required.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	Of the 10 activities identified, seven were completed with the remainder commenced and prioritised for completion in 2014/15. A delay to work commencing was attributed to the unavailability of machinery until early May 2014.
Auditing and Monitoring	There were 12 separate self audit and monitoring activities, all were completed.
Planning and Research	This section included a total of 47 activities, 40 of which were completed.
Education	As was the case in 12/13, three activities were identified under this section including working with the RFS on the engagement of rural lease holders and updating BOP details online. All three have been completed.
Response and Standby	TAMS staff observed 78 days of fire readiness during the reporting year. There were five days of total fire ban.
Seasonal Crew and Plant	This year the BOP identified five separate tasks around the engagement and training of seasonal employees and equipment - all of which were completed.
Unforeseen	The Directorate provided fire-fighters for RFS led deployments to the Blue Mountains and NSW South Coast, as well as a number of other fire emergencies in NSW and Victoria throughout the course of the bushfire season. Interstate deployments totalled approx 535 staff days.



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Yvette Berry MLA

**Review of Auditor-General's report No. 5 of 2013: *Bushfire Preparedness***  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**9 September 2014**

Asked by BRENDAN SMYTH MLA:

In relation to:

With regard to slashing activities undertaken by TAMS, the Committee was advised that to date 4,488 hectares of land had been subject to slashing. Officials undertook to confirm for the Committee whether or not the 4,488 hectares included amenity slashing—how much is bushfire related and how much is urban amenity related?

SHANE RATTENBURY MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

The total number of hectares slashed is 5,611, more than the 4,488 advised at the hearings. The entire 5,611 hectares of slashing activities planned to be delivered in the 2014/15 Bushfire Operations Plan is exclusively for bushfire fuel management purposes.

Significant slashing occurs in other areas across Canberra for amenity purposes.



Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Signature:

Date:

25/9/14

By the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Shane Rattenbury MLA





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**9 September 2014**

Asked by MR BRENDAN SMYTH MLA:

In relation to:

With regard to what has been achieved through the TAMS Bushfire Operations Plan (refer p. 13 Audit report), can the Committee be provided with a summary of what has been achieved in the development of the access network, i.e., quantity of work undertaken—for each year since the 2010–11 reporting period to current?

MR SHANE RATTENBURY MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

TAMS manages over 4,500 kilometres of fire trails. Access management covers the routine maintenance and upgrading of existing fire trails, and the assessment, planning and construction of new fire trails.

Access work delivered is provided at **Attachments A** for the 2010-11 through 2013-14 financial years.

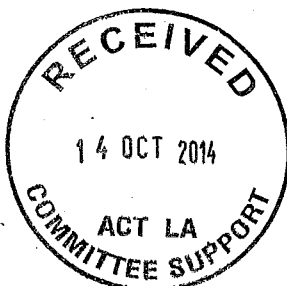
Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Signature:

Date:

13/10/14

By the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Shane Rattenbury MLA



**2010-11**

<b>Access Management Activity</b>	<b>Work Undertaken</b>
Maintenance	Over 326 km of fire trails across Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park and the forestry plantations in Kowen, Pierces Creek and Uriarra received routine maintenance. Three of the programmed tasks were deferred to the 2011-12 BOP with an additional 12 roads added to the 2010-11 BOP due to a needs re-assessment during the year
Upgrade of Fire Trails	6 km of fire trails were completed in the 2010/11 program and a further 13 kilometres of work was commenced but not completed. Nine remaining upgrades were rolled into the 2011-12 BOP. There were delays to the program due to storm damage to fire trails requiring urgent repairs.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	A total of 34 activities were identified – of these 28 were either completed or commenced before the end of June 2011. The remaining six activities were no longer required.
Storm Damage	The TAMS 2010-11 BOP was amended in response to heavy rainfall and storm events experienced late 2010 and early 2011. 19 activities were placed into the amended BOP to repair damage caused by the storms.

**2011-12**

<b>Access Management Activity</b>	<b>Work Undertaken</b>
Maintenance	The BOP identified 37 activities of maintenance across 295 km. A total of 26 activities across 157 km were completed and another nine (113 km) were commenced.
Upgrade of Fire Trails	Over 13 separate activities across 66 km of existing fire trails were identified as requiring an upgrade to either tanker road standard or float road standard. A total of two activities (4 km) were completed and work commenced on another 60 km of trails. Wet weather considerably reduced the operating window for upgrade works.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	162 km of trail side work covering three separate locations was completed.
Storm Damage	The ACT suffered a major storm event in March 2012. The ensuing damage to river crossings, fire trails and culverts undid much of the repair work completed after the 10/11 rainfall events. All high priority repairs were completed with ongoing damage assessment and repair to continue into 2012-13.

**2012-13**

<b>Access Management Activity</b>	<b>Work Undertaken</b>
Maintenance	The BOP identified 41 activities of maintenance across 440 km. A total of 35 of these activities were completed. Due to wet weather towards the end of the year, six of the tasks were carried over.
Upgrade of Fire Trails	15 separate activities across 39 km of existing fire trails were prioritised for upgrade, with 13 activities completed and 2 deferred to 13/14 year due to wet weather limitations.

Trail-side Vegetation Management	13 of the programmed 22 activities designed to manage overgrowth of road-side vegetation were completed. A further nine tasks were deferred to 2013/14 as the required machinery (sourced from Victoria) became unavailable.
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**2013-14**

<b>Access Management Activity</b>	<b>Work Undertaken</b>
Maintenance	The BOP identified 32 maintenance activities across 280 km. A total of 25 of these activities were completed; six were not required due to the roads being in good condition and one activity was deferred to the 14/15 BOP.
Upgrade of Fire Trails	Six activities across 31 km of existing fire trails were identified as requiring an upgrade to either tanker roads or float roads. Five of these activities were completed with the remaining activity no longer required.
Trail-side Vegetation Management	Of the 10 activities identified, seven were completed with the remainder commenced and prioritised for completion in 2014/15. A delay to work commencing was attributed to the unavailability of machinery until early May 2014.





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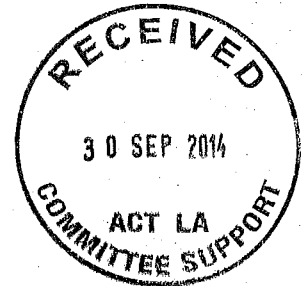
In relation to:

The fire personnel TAMS contributes to the whole of government resourcing pool—can the Committee be provided with numbers of TAMS specific incident controllers, operations controllers and their levels?

**SHANE RATTENBURY MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—**

The ACT Rural Fire Service has advised for 2014-15 it recognises skills sets in TAMS as follows:

- Level 3 Incident Controller – 1 person.
- Level 3 Deputy Incident Controller - 6 personnel.
- Level 2 Incident Controller – 6 personnel.
- Level 2 Deputy Incident Controller – 8 personnel.
- Level 3 Operations – 5 personnel.
- Level 2 Operations - 5 personnel.
- Other Incident Management Team roles – 40 personnel.



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Date:

25/9/14

By the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Shane Rattenbury MLA