

15 You were on duty from about 9 o'clock on that day?---That's  
16 correct.

17 And your responsibility was as group officer for the brigades  
18 obviously that fall into your group?---Yes.

19 I don't want to go over a lot of old ground in relation to  
20 this, but Ken Williamson, who was captain of the  
21 Whittlesea brigade, you sent him out to in effect  
22 reconnoitre and provide information back to you from the  
23 fireground?---That's correct.

24 And in that context, to remind us in the last week of the  
25 Commission, do you want to describe the fire conditions  
26 reported back, what they were like and in your experience  
27 where they rated?---Certainly Ken is highly experienced.  
28 He is the first deputy group officer. I sent him to  
29 Wandong just as the fire crossed the Hume Highway because  
30 up until then we believed from - we had been talking to  
31 the FMO, Steve Grant, from DSE, and we believed with

1 the northerly it was actually going to run down through  
2 Eden Park right down through Mernda, Doreen, all those  
3 sorts of areas, but the wind started to swing around. Ken  
4 certainly plotted the fire for us. As he drove back to  
5 Whittlesea it was actually spotting alongside the car at  
6 100 kilometres an hour. He relayed every few minutes the  
7 progress of the fire. But it was a firestorm that he had  
8 never seen before.

9 You were, as I understand it, attempting to get resources from  
10 was it region 14?---From within our own group, we wanted  
11 to step up our local strike team, yes.

12 And you were unable to do that?---Yes.

13 Why was that, do you know? Was it because of the commitment of  
14 resources elsewhere?---No.

15 Why?---Reluctance of the operations - the duty officer at  
16 region 14 to implement that request.

17 How many times did you ask for that?---Three.

18 Did you get those resources?---Only as individual resources  
19 once the computer aided dispatch system responded them.

20 Why did you think you needed them?---We knew where the fire was  
21 going because Ken had indicated where it was coming from  
22 and where it was due to go, and we had relayed this on to  
23 the region 14 RECC as well.

24 And the region 14 RECC is based?---At Melton.

25 There are just a couple of other matters. You also refer at  
26 paragraph 37 to your use of the region 14 Mount  
27 Disappointment wildfire response plan, which outlines  
28 operational structure for a fire at Mount Disappointment,  
29 including the approved communications plan, the contacts  
30 for the relevant MERO, MECC and MERC and the divisional  
31 emergency response, incident control centres, and the plan

1 had not been updated to include the current level 3 ICC  
2 footprint for Kilmore. You were working off a plan that  
3 was still utilising 2005 DSE offices at Broadford as the  
4 main ICC with the Diamond Creek emergency service complex  
5 as an alternative?---That's correct.

6 What did that mean in relation to your attempts to communicate  
7 with the incident control centre for the Kilmore East  
8 fire?---It made it impossible because we only had the one  
9 advertised number, which is the Kilmore fire station  
10 number, and we were unable to get through. It was  
11 constantly engaged, because we didn't have a copy of the  
12 Displan numbers.

13 So in the sense that Ken Williamson was reporting back to you,  
14 what sort of difficulty did you face in reporting his  
15 observations to the Kilmore ICC?---It was impossible. So  
16 I had to go back through the region 14 RECC.

17 The Arthurs Creek-Strathewen brigade with its captain, David  
18 McGahy, falls into your group?---That's correct.

19 He has given evidence of his conversations with you. There was  
20 one issue I wanted to go to at paragraph 85 of your  
21 statement at 0225. It concerns your overview in relation  
22 to 7 February, where you indicate as I understand it after  
23 7 February that "for several days we acted as an  
24 independent ICC and received little support from Kangaroo  
25 Ground. Support was organised through region 14 RECC,  
26 strike teams from groups in region 14 and throughout the  
27 state". What happened? What did that mean for  
28 you?---Probably at Whittlesea, where the div comm was, we  
29 were pretty well resourced because we had the staging area  
30 there and we were probably pretty right. But for Arthurs  
31 Creek, because they weren't originally in our division, it

1 did mean that they were unable to access food, fuel and we  
2 had to make alternative arrangements to get that. I think  
3 they were overwhelmed, I think is the - - -

4 Mr McGahy told us of those circumstances that existed  
5 afterwards. I'm just not quite sure why that  
6 existed?---No, neither am I.

7 At paragraph 87 you indicate that the lack of communication  
8 with Kilmore meant that you, as the group officer,  
9 received no advice, no strategy, nothing was put to you as  
10 to how this fire was being run?---No. Probably, to be  
11 fair, though, I felt they were overwhelmed and we operated  
12 independently and did the best we could with the resources  
13 we had available.

14 Indeed. I think there is an understanding of what was called  
15 upon at least initially by the Kilmore CFA. Mr Holland,  
16 is there anything else that you wanted to bring to the  
17 attention of the Commissioners out of the two statements  
18 that have been tendered?---No. I would perhaps just like  
19 to take the opportunity to publicly thank my people and  
20 the people that came to assist. Some of the things that  
21 they did on that day and the weeks after were  
22 unbelievable. I have great respect for all those people  
23 on the ground, the work that they did, and in the weeks  
24 and months after. It is still lingering now, some of the  
25 psychological issues that the members of the brigades and  
26 the communities up that way are still suffering.

27 I think you mentioned in particular immediately afterwards the  
28 efforts of the Salvation Army in providing resources, food  
29 and the like?---They were fantastic, yes.

30 They are the matters, Commissioners.

31 MS BUTTON: Commissioners, no questions for Mr Holland, but if

1 we could just reserve the State's position. There has  
2 been no notice given that matters pertaining to the  
3 Kilmore fire would be revisited in circumstances where  
4 counsel assisting have made submissions on that fire and  
5 the State and other parties have responded.

6 CHAIRMAN: Yes. Thank you.

7 MR RUSH: Commissioners, may Mr Holland be excused?

8 CHAIRMAN: Yes. Thank you, Mr Holland; you are excused.

9 <(THE WITNESS WITHDREW)

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