

## Attachment 1: Fire related stand-by and overtime hours from a representative sample of DPaW staff on IMT rosters, 2014 –2015 fire season

Submitted by a DPaW delegate

Seven of the officers are from the Swan Region, comprising Perth Hills and Swan Coastal District. Two are from Wellington District and based in Collie and represent a variety of roles within the IMTs. Approval has been given by each officer for their data to be included in this response.

The figures below include the total hours each officer was on standby (detention) over the 31 weeks of the season (mid-May – mid-October) and the total hours of fire overtime. Both of these figures have been divided by 37.5 to equate to a working week to give some perspective to the huge commitment required of us through the long bushfire season.

	Stand-by		Overtime (Fire-related)		Total time impact	
	# hours	Equivalent in weeks	# hours	Equivalent in weeks	(work time + stand-by + overtime)*	worked over the 31 week period**
<b>Perth Hills District and Swan Coastal District – Swan Region</b>						
Officer 1	1291	34.5	563	15	2956.5hr	78.8 wks
Officer 2	1098	29.3	580	15.5	2780.5	74.1
Officer 3	1260	33.6	450.5	12	2813	75
Officer 4	607	16	438	12	2147.5	57.3
Officer 5	1789	47.7	423.5	11.3	3315	88.4
Officer 6	803	21	770	20.5	2675.5	71.3
Officer 7	1077	28.2	491	13.1	2670.5	71.2
<b>Average: Swan Region</b>	<b>1132</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>530.8</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>2765.3</b>	<b>73.7</b>
<b>Wellington District - Collie</b>						
Officer 8	1035	27.7	389.5	10.4	2527	67.4
Officer 9	1070.5	28.5	301	8	2473.5	66
<b>Average: Wellington</b>	<b>1052</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>345.4</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>66.7</b>

\*Assumes that the officer works/is available for all but the public holidays.

\*\* Normal working time, excluding public holidays, is 1102.5 hours based on a 37.5 hour week.

These figures clearly demonstrate the excessive and, to many, probably inconceivable amount of hours many of our key fire staff are expected to do over a 7 month period. I say seven months as **these figures are in reference to the 'fire season' only**. Outside of this period we continue to work long hours undertaking prescribed burning. It should



also be noted that for many of us in the districts fire is not our substantive role. Our Monday to Friday jobs are often not fire related – Nature Conservation officer, Parks and Visitor Services officer etc. This ‘normal’ work still has to be done.

As you move further north, south and east from these the Perth Hills, Swan Coastal and Wellington district these numbers would significantly reduce, particularly the overtime due to a large decrease in fire numbers. To give some perspective Perth Hills District responded to over 130 fires this season and Swan Coastal the same. Generally the more southern locations will have no more than 30 at a rough guess.

The AWU submission references fatigue and I would like to make the point that fatigue is not only from a short term event but in our case an endless work load throughout the year. I would also like the CPSU to provide to Mr Ferguson the above figures to give him some perspective on the hours many key fire staff are expected to put in throughout the year in addition to the standard working week. There is only one interpretation that can be made and that is that DPAW does not have enough trained people to undertake the work required of them. There are a couple of reasons for this. The most obvious being the decline in district staffing numbers over past decades and the merging throughout the southwest of what previously were separate districts into ‘super districts’. For example the Perth Hills district now comprises what used to be three individual districts – Mundaring, Jarrahdale and Dwellingup. The merging of these districts into one, including its management structure, has seen one individual now covering for three in most instances. In Perth Hills one Fire Coordinator is now responsible for fire and burning across the districts forested and urban interface areas covering 700,000 hectares of DPAW estate and 13 local government shires. Similarly all other key roles (District Manager, Senior Operations, Program Coordinators) are in the same predicament.

Furthermore, less district/departmental staff are available or keen to be involved in prescribed burning and fire control resulting in less people carrying the majority of the load. This can be attributed to:

- the retirement of fire skilled district staff;
- existing staff wanting a better work/life balance;
- program leaders targeting staff who are able/keen to do their program work (parks, nature conservation etc.) but not be involved in fire operations;
- multiple roster commitments (e.g. district, pre-formed teams, aviation, state logistics, mapping etc.)
- all staff not being required to play an active fire/burning role involved as happened to a greater degree in previous decades;
- staff concern at exposure to risk;
- the closure of the graduate recruit/cadet program which targeted people keen to be involved in all district operations, including fire.

In my 16 years with the department I have heard ongoing internal discussion regarding the likely brain drain of fire practitioners from the agency due to retirement and the need to plan for this. We are now in the early stages of this and I do not see any serious

efforts (State Government or agency) in replacing the lost skills with the required numbers of appropriate staff – those willing to be actively involved in fire and more importantly with ability the ability to be skilled up to a senior level and willing to accept the exposure to risk that comes with it. The department may reference the FMDP (Fire Management Development Program) as a means of achieving this but personally it is a band aid fix to a much larger problem.

*Additional comment by fellow DPaW delegate: "I was at a fire meeting yesterday and 9 of the 13 people present will be gone in 5 years, many in possibly 3 years. I am sure this is not unique but is representative of the Department. This situation is no longer urgent, it is scary. It is hard to imagine the workload and pressure that those remaining will be under. This boat is no longer just leaking, it has a huge hole in it with hundreds of years of experience (there was around 400 years' experience in that room alone) about to flow through".*

The end result of the above is that fewer of us are expected to do more. Even worse is that our families, relationships and mental health are suffering – whether we care to admit it or not. Incidents such as Boorabin and the Margaret River fire (burn escape) have resulted in many of the potential future senior fire leaders steering away from taking on any further responsibility, such as Incident Controllers, Operations Officers etc. due to the potential for something to go wrong and the likely blame that comes with it.

If this agency has any hope of reaching and maintaining a reasonable prescribed burning target, effectively managing bushfires into the future and retaining its fire skilled staff and crews it needs to be supported with more people on the ground. The commitment the above eight staff give throughout the year in prescribed burning and fire operations is not sustainable. This should be warning enough.