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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine Bush Fire Brigade

23 June 2016

Today I speak on behalf of the Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine communities in my electorate. Driving out to "the Mounts" is always a delightful experience. The area is stunning and remote. Recently I had the pleasure of attending the annual general meeting of the Mount Wilson-Mount Irvine Rural Fire Brigade. The executive committee is made up of both administration members and operational members. They are President David Howell, Vice President Henric Nicholas, Treasurer Susie Hope, Secretary Judy Tribe and Elizabeth Montano, who leads the Bowens Creek Road campaign. The operational members are Captain Beth Raines, Senior Deputy Captain Peter Raines, Barry Freeman, who until the 2016 annual general meeting was also a deputy captain, and Graham Tribe from training, Kathleen Oakes from community engagement and Lesley Wilson from catering.

A few other operational members deserve to be acknowledged for their work in the brigade. They are Stephen Dean from maintenance, Deputy Captain Peter Dempsey from fire trails maintenance and Vic Zhukov from fire trails and remote area firefighting. I make particular mention of the brigade's community first responders or CFR team, that provides an amazing service as the first response to a 000 ambulance call in the area. With the community being isolated, time is of the essence when dealing with a medical emergency. The CFR team guide the ambulance to the site of the emergency, having all the paperwork done and the patient stabilised by the time the ambulance arrives. The CFR team is made up of Barry Freeman, Diana Landsberg, Kathleen Oakes, Beth Raines, Libby Raines, Peter Raines and three members who have almost completed their training, being Allen and Robyn Hyde and Linda Raines. I congratulate and thank them all.

The community often thinks that rural fire brigades only attend to firefighting; however, the Mount Wilson-Mount Irvine brigade provides assistance during bushfires, search and rescue operations, motor vehicle accidents and storm clean-ups, and it provides the CFR service. A major issue that has been impacting this tight-knit community for a number of years now is the Bowens Creek Bridge, Bowens Creek Fire Trail and Mount Irvine Road area. I believe the argument that there is a desperate need for an emergency vehicle access route has been well established. The fire trail provides the only emergency egress and access for firefighting and other emergency services. However, it is in a very poor state of disrepair.

I acknowledge Elizabeth Montano, who has advocated on behalf of her community to have this most urgent need addressed. She has done so tirelessly, articulating the key issues with precision, and a sense of purpose and passion. I also acknowledge the efforts

of Tim Gow, a former resident of Mount Wilson of 47 years and a former deputy captain of the Mount Wilson-Mount Irvine Rural Fire Brigade. In 2015 Mr Gow said that the fire trail must be part of the defensive strategy to protect the northern and western edges of the upper Blue Mountains. He called on Hawkesbury City Council to urgently work with Blue Mountains City Council in developing a joint submission to State and Federal bodies. Mr Gow went on to say:

To all the key decision makers—please do not let apathy or disinterest prevail; given the recent past of fire behaviour, frequency and intensity in both the Blue Mountains and other areas across Australia, such inaction will only be seen as culpable neglect.

I say in this place, for the benefit of this community and in thanking Tim Gow for his succinct account of the situation, "Hear, hear!" For the Government's benefit I will briefly outline part of the case ably compiled by the wise and industrious Elizabeth Montano. There is currently only one useable road in and out of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine. It is Mount Wilson Road, a two-lane sealed road that runs from the Bells Line of Road along a very exposed ridge line and through dense bush up to Mount Wilson for a distance of approximately eight kilometres. There is then approximately 10 kilometres of sealed, winding road between Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine. The only access route, Mount Wilson Road, has been cut off during many natural disaster events over the years.

The October 2013 bushfires caused the loss of two houses at Mount Irvine and the loss of fencing and sheds at both Mount Irvine and Mount Wilson. At the height of the fire the road was blocked. Neither residents nor the rural fire brigade fire appliances working in the area could get from one side to the other. Not only could they not assist in firefighting on the other side of the blockages; they also had no escape route. On the day of the snowstorm in October 2014 a machinery accident led to the death of a resident. Had the accident resulted in injury rather than death the condition of Mount Wilson Road and surrounding roads was such that an ambulance would not have been able to get through.

Over recent years the Mounts has experienced a substantial increase in tourism, up to approximately 30,000 visitations per annum. An emergency access route is needed. The Mounts community and the rural fire brigade require a fit-for-purpose emergency vehicle access route. They are not seeking the route to be restored to public road standards or for it to be made available for general public use. This strategically significant project requires State or Federal funding. It needs it now. Let us ensure that someone does not lose their lives before we act.