

A firefighter in silhouette, wearing a helmet and holding a tool, stands in the foreground. The background is filled with thick, orange-brown smoke and the dark, skeletal branches of trees, creating a somber and urgent atmosphere.

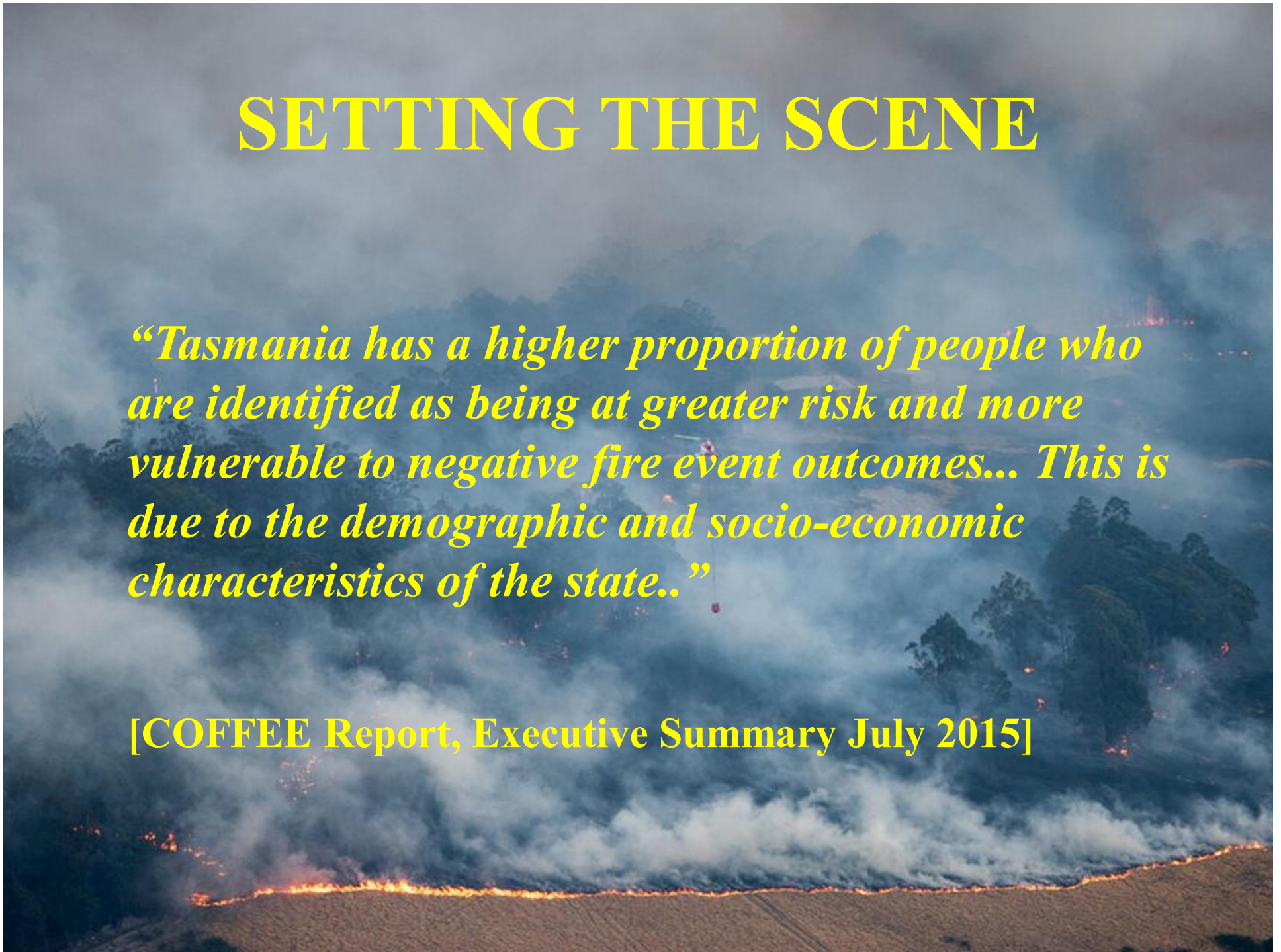
TASMANIA FIRE CRISIS

**UFUA TASMANIA BRANCH
SECRETARY GREG COOPER**

SETTING THE SCENE

“Tasmania has a higher proportion of people who are identified as being at greater risk and more vulnerable to negative fire event outcomes... This is due to the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the state..”

[COFFEE Report, Executive Summary July 2015]



SETTING THE SCENE

Tasmania is vulnerable to fire risk because we have:

- “ More elderly people
- “ More disabled people
- “ More socio-economic challenges
- “ Low education level
- “ Low employment levels
- “ People who consume more alcohol
- “ One of the highest bushfire prone environments in the world



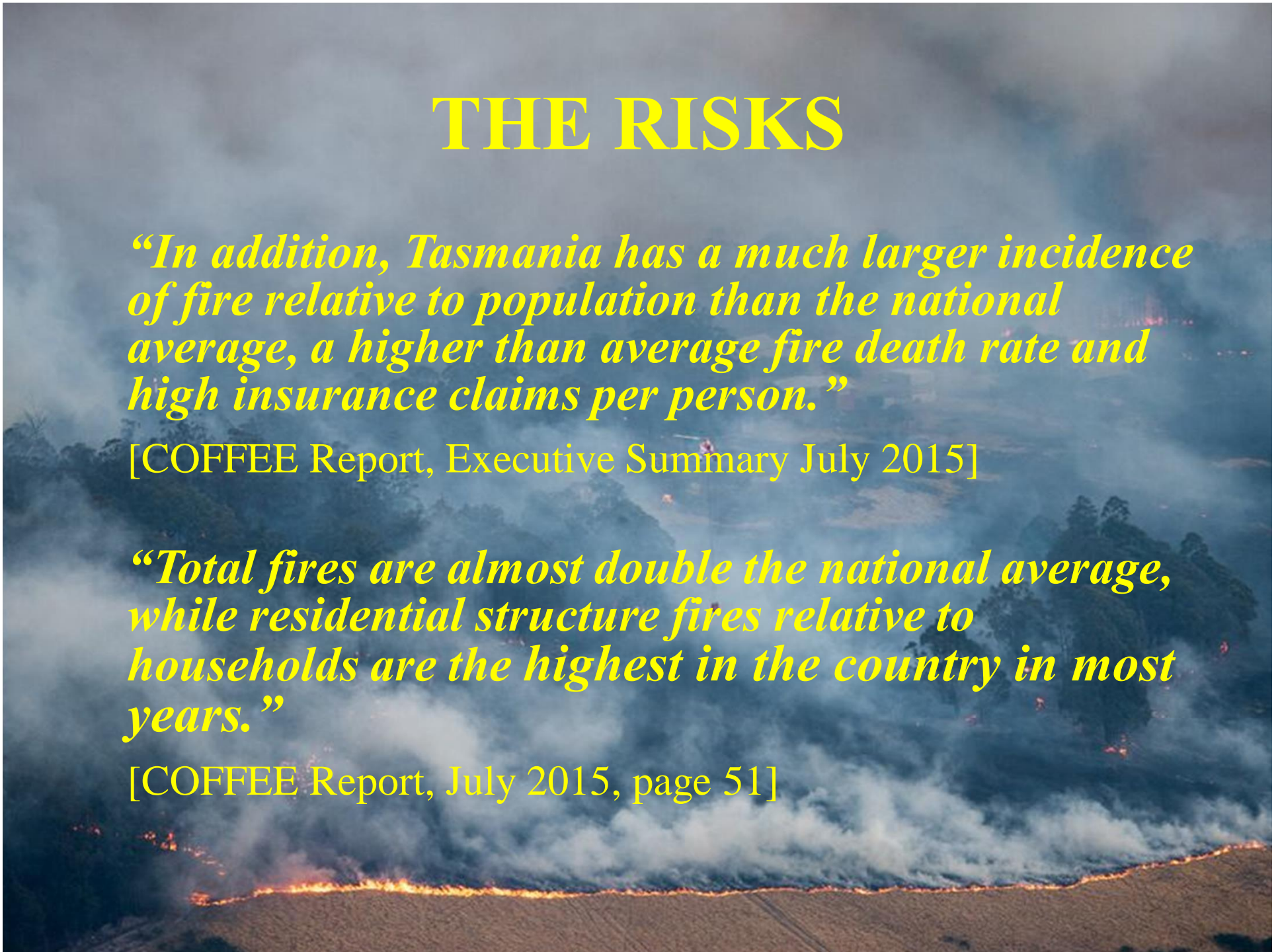
THE RISKS

“In addition, Tasmania has a much larger incidence of fire relative to population than the national average, a higher than average fire death rate and high insurance claims per person.”

[COFFEE Report, Executive Summary July 2015]

“Total fires are almost double the national average, while residential structure fires relative to households are the highest in the country in most years.”

[COFFEE Report, July 2015, page 51]



THE ISSUES

Despite our above average fire risk we have:

- “ Lower than average expenditure per capita on fire services by government
- “ Lower than average numbers per capita of career fire fighters
- “ A reduction in public servant staffing levels in government fire suppression agencies

TASMANIA FIRE CRISIS

The 2014 State Government Budget impacted on the SFC budget and TFS structures in three areas;

- “ Transfer of SES responsibility from the Department of Police and Emergency Management (DPEM) budget to the SFC budget
- “ Support for the Fuel Reduction Burn programme
- “ The announcement of the Corporate Services Review

BACKDOOR BUDGET CUT

SES Transfer

- “ The 2014 State Government budget transferred the cost of the SES staff from the DPEM to the Fire Service
- “ Earlier in the year, prior to this decision, the Fire Service budget had already been approved by the Minister of the Department



BACKDOOR BUDGET CUT

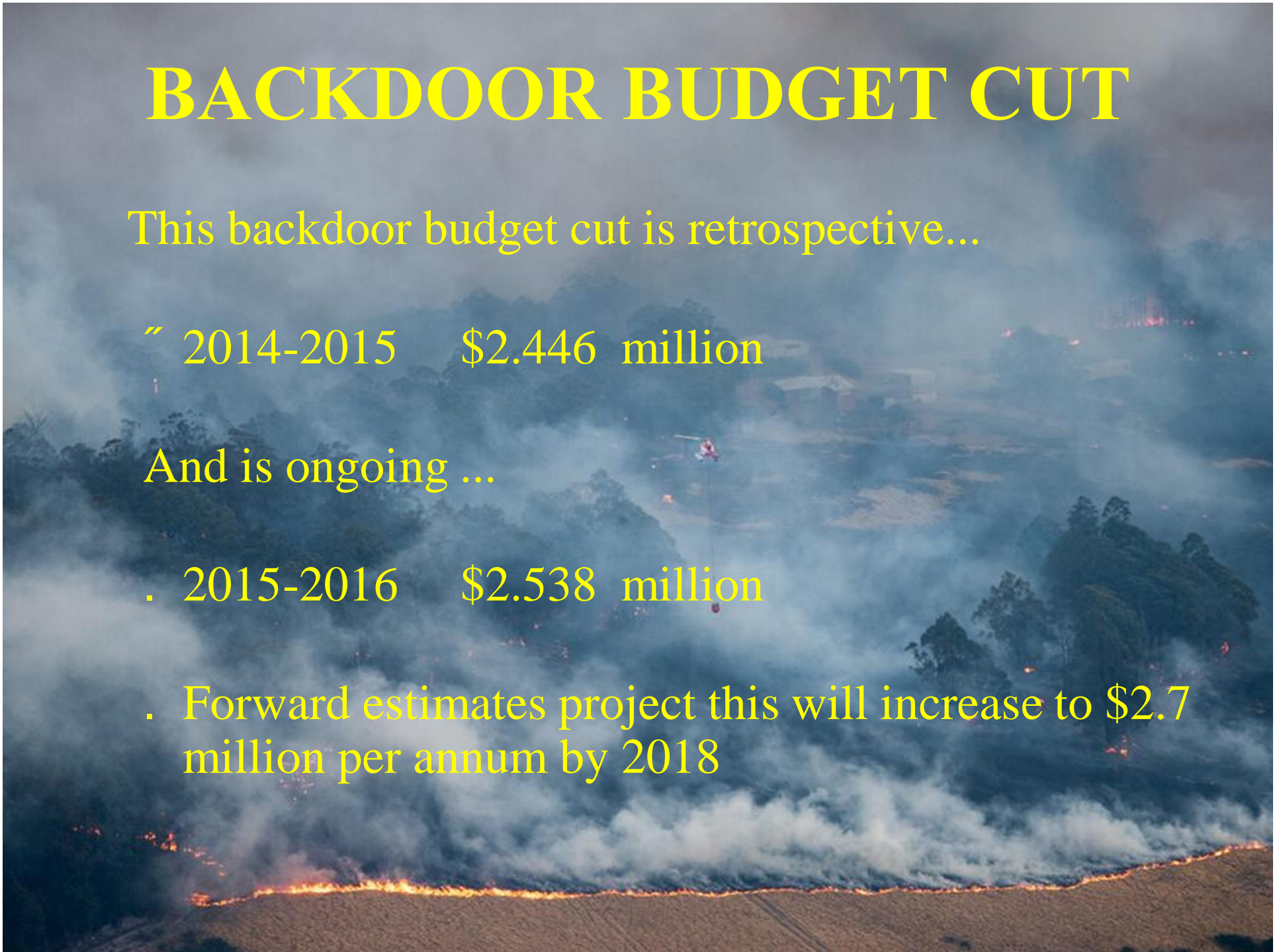
This backdoor budget cut is retrospective...

” 2014-2015 \$2.446 million

And is ongoing ...

. 2015-2016 \$2.538 million

. Forward estimates project this will increase to \$2.7 million per annum by 2018



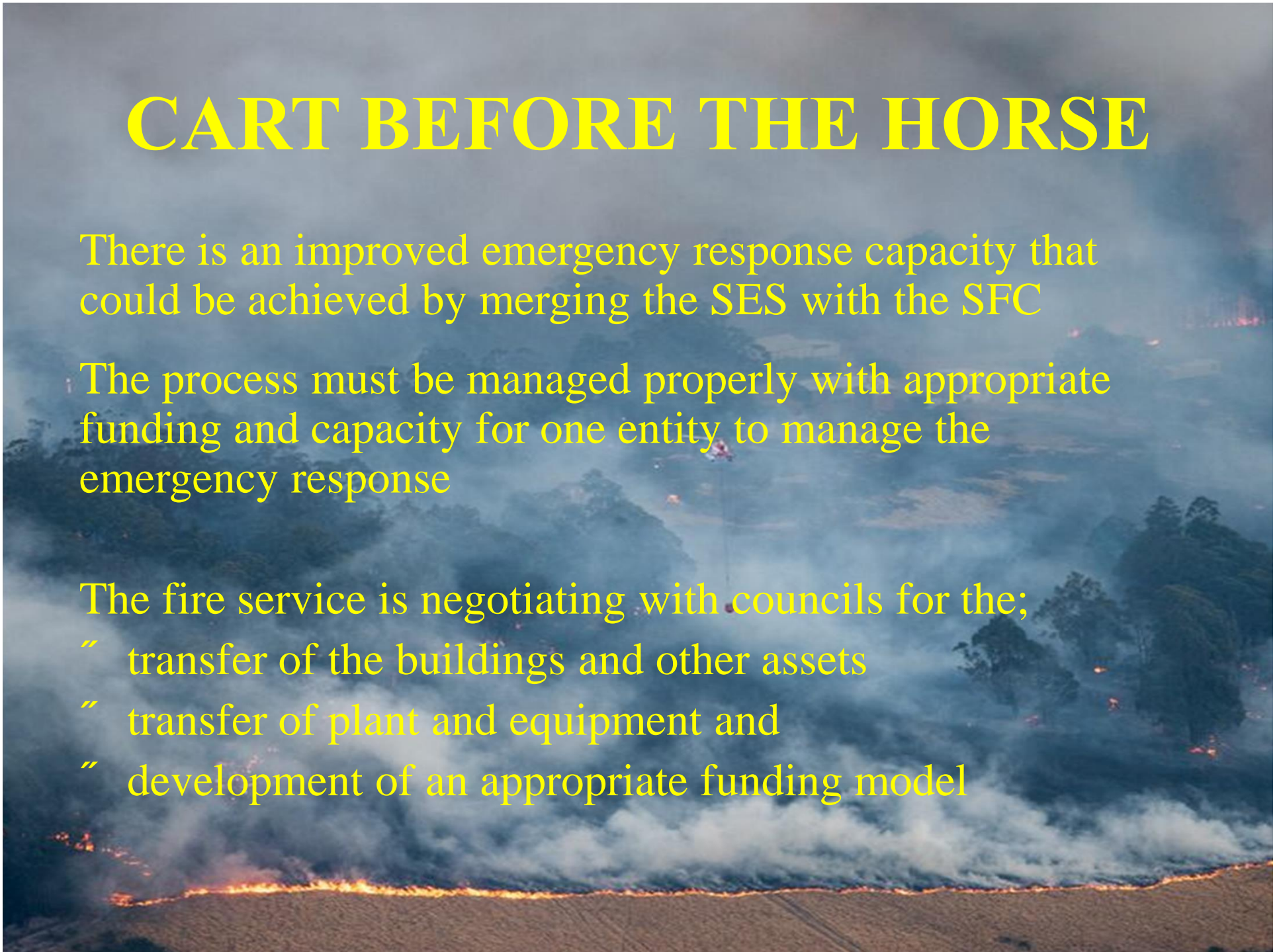
CART BEFORE THE HORSE

There is an improved emergency response capacity that could be achieved by merging the SES with the SFC

The process must be managed properly with appropriate funding and capacity for one entity to manage the emergency response

The fire service is negotiating with councils for the;

- “ transfer of the buildings and other assets
- “ transfer of plant and equipment and
- “ development of an appropriate funding model



QUESTIONS ARISE

How can Fire Service money be spent on other than fire related matters?

” Section 107 of the Fire Service Act initially allowed for additional expenditure up to \$1000 per annum

” 1995 reform to the Act saw the \$1000 limit removed

“It appears it is now being used to allow payments of more than \$2 million for non-fire related activities.”

[COFFEE Report, July 2015, page 33]

IMPLICATIONS

Budget cuts imposed on the Fire Service means that there is millions of dollars less to spend each year on:

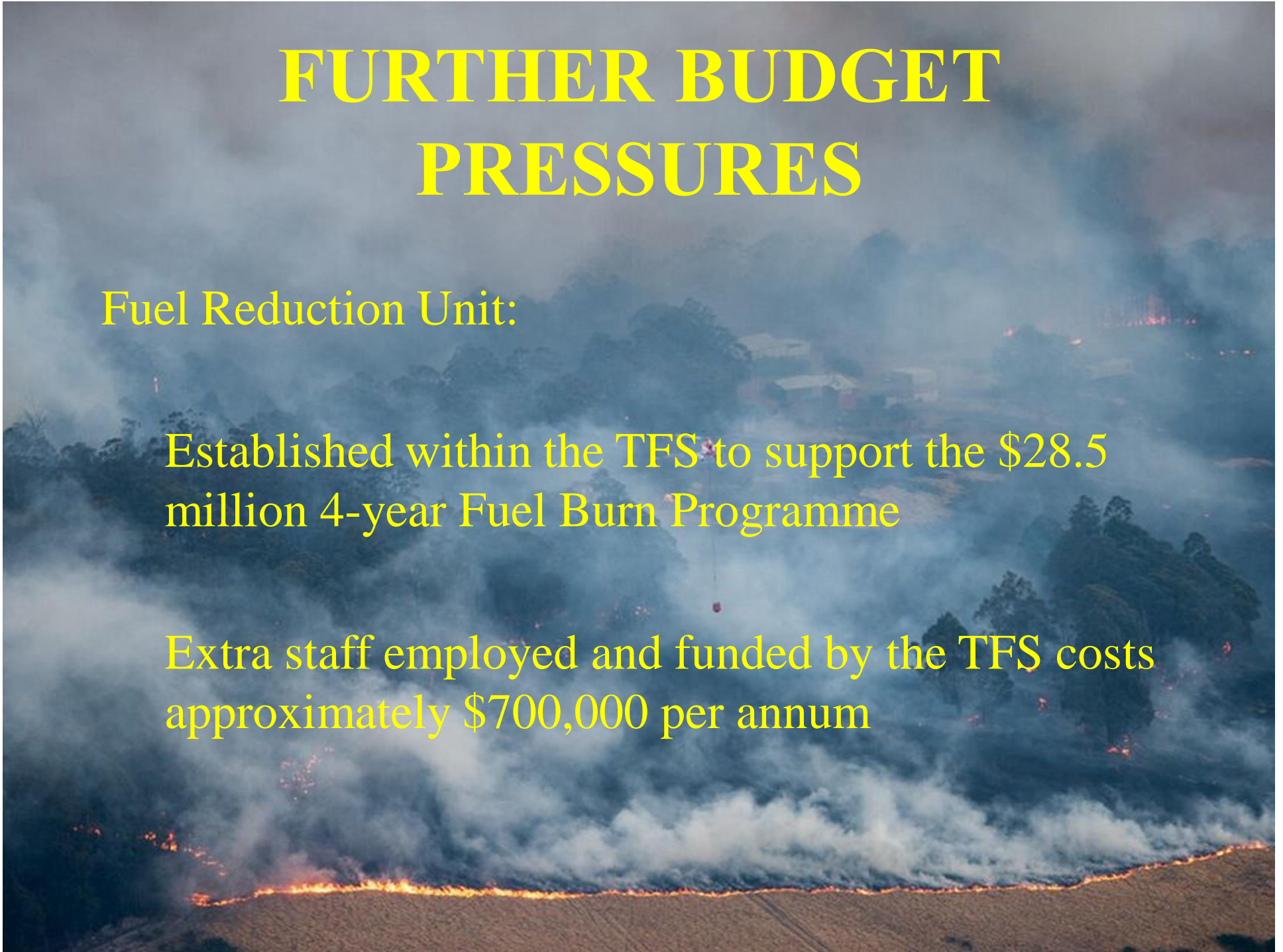
- ” Implementing cancer mitigating programmes
- ” Training
- ” Protective Clothing (PPC)
- ” Station upgrades
- ” Emergency response equipment
- ” Fire Trucks
- ” Community Protection Programmes
- ” Human Services support

FURTHER BUDGET PRESSURES

Fuel Reduction Unit:

Established within the TFS to support the \$28.5 million 4-year Fuel Burn Programme

Extra staff employed and funded by the TFS costs approximately \$700,000 per annum



CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW

In August 2014 DPEM initiated a review of corporate support arrangements of Tasmania Police, Forensic Services, Tasmania Fire Service, and SES to look at:

- “ Financial management and payroll services
- “ Asset management including fleet management
- “ Information management services
- “ Information technology services
- “ Communication services



CORPORATE SERVICES INTEGRATION

But the process has far reaching implications for the SFC, TFS and ultimately for firefighters

In the flow charts coming out of the review there are no reporting lines from the Corporate Service Directors re/financial/physical resources/information services and communication technology to the Chief Officer TFS

Instead the two Corporate Directors report to the DPEM Secretary/Police Commissioner

Morphed from a review to an integration project without consultation

CORPORATE SERVICES PROCESS

A number of questions need to be asked;

- “ Where is the due diligence?
- “ Where is the transparency?
- “ Where is the community consultation ?
- “ Why were firefighters not consulted?
- “ Is there any regard for the Fire Service Act?
- “ How is Fire Service money accounted for in the process?
- “ Will it effect emergency response and mitigation?

CORPORATE SERVICES PROCESS

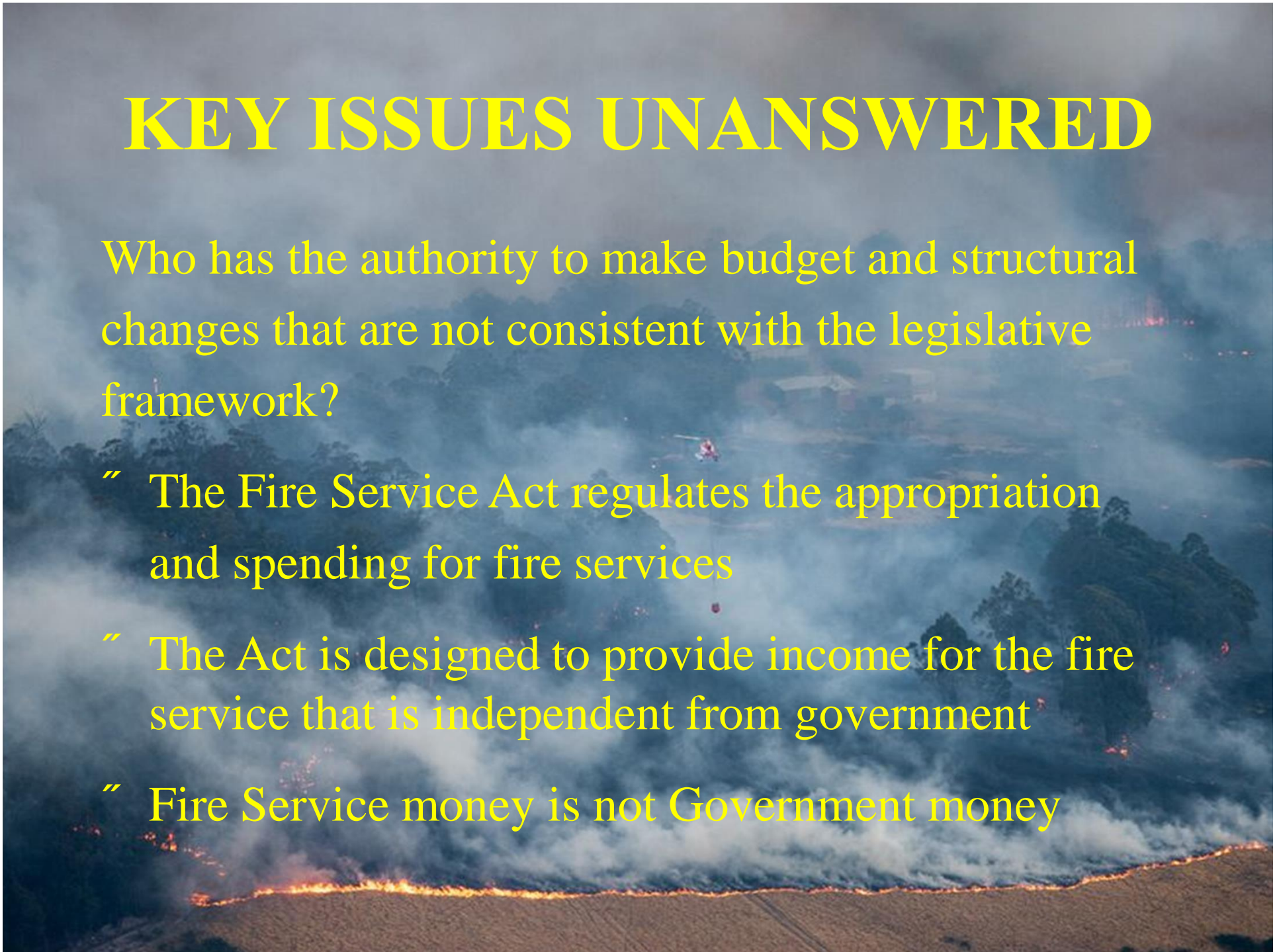
“Legal advice will need to be sought to consider such issues as authority/delegations for decision making, ability to utilise funding sources for corporate services, and reporting frameworks.”

[DPEM Project 7 ó Review of the Delivery of Corporate services Report, Page 16]

KEY ISSUES UNANSWERED

Who has the authority to make budget and structural changes that are not consistent with the legislative framework?

- “ The Fire Service Act regulates the appropriation and spending for fire services
- “ The Act is designed to provide income for the fire service that is independent from government
- “ Fire Service money is not Government money



THE RISKS

“Placing extra demands on the budget of the SFC means it can direct fewer funds to maintaining and improving the TFS. The new funding arrangements now covered by the SFC will result in either an unsustainable budget position for the SFC, or neglect of the upkeep and maintenance of the TFS.”

[COFFEE Report, Executive Summary, July 2015]

REDUCED FIREFIGHTING CAPACITY

Cuts to forestry firefighting staffing levels has reduced frontline firefighting response capacity

The responsibility will fall to TFS

“The impact of climate change on Tasmania will require additional resources to be directed towards the fire service, including a further increase in the number of firefighters. Based on modelling of possible climate change scenarios, Tasmania could require between 367 and 395 by 2030.”

[COFFEE Report, Executive Summary, July 2015]

UFUA CAMPAIGN

The campaign purpose is to:

- “ Educate the public
- “ Lobby politicians
- “ Restore the independent fire service budget
- “ Establish a sustainable emergency response funding model independent from government
- “ Address the risks to Tasmania of an inadequate fire suppression capacity
- “ Build a safer community



WHY MUST WE ACT?

The government took \$5 million out of the Fire Service budget to fund the SES

They have since agreed to restore \$1.5 million for capital expenditure

There is still \$3.5 million outstanding

The Corporate Services Review, now an integration project, continues without appropriate service level agreements being established

What this means for the Fire Service response is unclear



WHAT MUST WE DO?

We must hold the Government to account to ensure fire service funding is solely for the fire service!

We must maintain the independence of the State Fire Commission!

We must maintain the authority of the Chief Fire Officer!

We must maintain the integrity of the fire service both legally and fiscally!



WHAT DO WE NEED?

We need to keep building a safer community

We need to maintain state-wide fire prevention and suppression capacity

We need to maintain an independent Fire Service

We need transparent funding

We need more firefighters

We need the Fuel Reduction programme to continue beyond 2018



An aerial photograph of a large wildfire. Thick, dark smoke billows from the fire, filling the upper half of the frame. Below the smoke, a line of fire is visible, with some trees and structures in the background. The text is overlaid in yellow.

TASMANIA TOO PRECIOUS TO LET BURN

Thank you