

Use of radio in emergency

IT would be appreciated if the Director of the P.M.G. Department would answer the following matters through the Press.

On Tuesday, February 21, his department was approached for permission to use amateur radio frequencies to assist Civil Defence Communications, if required, in the Strickland, Elderslie and Nugent areas.

The reply which was, I believe, a directive from the director, was that "amateur frequencies are not to be used under any circumstances" — despite the fact that he was informed that a state of emergency still existed and that the radio vehicles he offered as an alternative would not suffice or, in fact, be available.

His suggestion of using the Army communications was not practical as in the main outbreak an Army unit was assisted by a mobile radio unit belonging to and operated by a radio amateur.

The director was informed also of the seriousness of the situation.

Further, as a counter to the request I believe he personally contacted the Controller — Inspector Fletcher — and offered him the use of the radio vehicles.

Does this mean that if, in the unforeseeable future, another emergency eventuates, radio amateurs will be prevented from assisting communications in this State?

Why, then, are they permitted to assist in emergencies in N.S.W. and Victoria, when alternative communication facilities are more plentiful than in Tasmania?

It is understood that the P.M.G. has been co-operative to civil defence before this.

Lindisfarne.

E. A. BEARD.

• "Irresponsible" radio messages

Help was enlisted from Post Office

THE Commissioner of Police (Mr. Fletcher) had enlisted the support of the Post Office to suppress irresponsible messages over mobile transmitters, so evident on the day of the great fires.

The Director of Posts and Telegraphs (Mr. R. R. Gilson) said this yesterday, replying to questions from Mr. E. A. Beard, who wrote to "The Mercury" on the use of amateurs to help civil defence communications on February 21.

Mr. Gilson said the Post-

master-General recognised the Government appointee — the Commissioner of Police — as the supreme authority in the emergency.

The commissioner had not surrendered any of his authority on February 21. No civil defence emergency had been declared.

The commissioner had also confirmed that on that day he had ample communications available in all areas of the State.

In fact — in addition to his own facilities — the Army was helping the Signals unit in the Nugent area.

Irresponsible messages had spread alarm and despondency, and had hampered fire-fighting.

Mr. Gilson said the P.M.G. fully supported the Government in its endeavours to have an orderly and efficient organisation for emergencies.

It consequently supported the commissioner in his request to help eliminate unlawful and misleading reports over mobile transmitters.

Any action necessary during future emergencies would be taken in conjunction with appointed authorities.

Mr. Gilson added that the P.M.G. had played a significant part in determining the communications scheme for the Civil Defence Organisation.

Invaluable help by radio operators

WE would like to add weight to the complaint of Mr. E. A. Beard, as regards the conduct of the P.M.G.'s Department, towards the amateur radio operators, during the recent bush fire crisis.

Being attached to the Civil Defence Organisation, we were able to gain a first hand knowledge of the services performed by these people with their radio equipment.

Some of the readers may not be aware that after the fire had raced through outlying districts, there was no communication by means of P.M.G. wires — they had been burnt to the ground.

However, by a deal of foresight and the strategic placing of radios and operators at such places as Colebrook, Richmond, Woodbridge, Mt. Rumney, Mt. Wellington, and a host of other vantage points, communication with stricken areas was maintained throughout the critical stages.

We, personally, went into many of these areas and saw for ourselves the magnificent work these amateurs were doing.

Sometimes their vigil lasted for 36 hours, often without sleep and with little food. Sometimes it was a lonely

vigil on a little, fire-blackened hill out in the middle of nowhere, just acting as a repeater station, if required.

When we personally visited such a lonely spot and inquired from the operator as to how long he intended to remain there, we were simply and honestly told, "Until a replacement arrives."

We earnestly appeal to all the people in those areas served by the amateurs, particularly Colebrook and Richmond, to give us their whole-hearted support and backing in making public the magnificent effort of these, as yet, unsung heroes.

We feel sure, that if another such emergency arose, the services of these people would again be of untold value, as indeed they were on this occasion.

Hobart.

LITTLE BOYS BLUE.

3/3/67 Work of amateur radios in emergency praised

SUPPORTING the valuable work carried out by the amateur radio operators, I think I can speak for the people of Colebrook and Richmond.

From "Ash Tuesday" until the following Friday when the radio operators appeared at Richmond and Colebrook it was a period of frustration as far as communications were concerned. With the P.M.G. lines down the only means of communication to Colebrook were messages taken through by individuals using whatever transport was available and the police network.

The council chambers being locked up, except during normal working hours, it was necessary to use private telephones to contact Hobart and elsewhere, making things more difficult.

Should another emergency arise, let all tapes be automatically cut, and let these essential volunteers get on to the job with their radios, as this proved to be the most satisfactory communication of all in the circumstances prevailing at the time.

As Controller for Civil Defence and Emergency Service for the Richmond Municipality, I wish to thank all the operators who tirelessly and cheerfully carried out a splendid job.

Richmond. F. S. KELLY.

Obviously Mr. Gilson or Mr. Fletcher have been misinformed. As most messages from amateur radio mobiles came

through our "control" station at Belle-rive, we would know of any irresponsible radio messages.

On the contrary, these mobiles spent a lot of time and travelled many miles (even at the request of the police) to check out reports of fires in certain areas. In some cases these proved to be false reports handed to the police, so consequently our mobiles saved the police quite a lot of time and trouble.

If at any time irresponsible messages were handled by our mobiles (this I doubt very much) they would be handed in, and accepted for re-transmission by our radio operators in good faith. To date we have not heard of one single case of "alarm or despondency, etc." due

to any actions of our radio members.

On the other hand, we have received messages of gratitude from the very highest levels down to those for whom we spent our time helping, without any thought of reward and certainly not expecting condemnation, especially without foundation.

Frankly, it disturbs me greatly to see any member of our community with such an attitude towards these young men who did such a magnificent job.

Mr. Gilson should substantiate or publicly withdraw allegations or inferences of unlawful and misleading reports insofar as it concerns the amateur radio service.

Bellerive.

L. CORDELL.