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2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012

Economics and Industry Standing Committee  
Level 1, 11 Harvest Terrace  
West Perth WA 6005

ATTN: Tim Hughes  
Principal Research Officer

**Submission – Inquiry into 2011 Kimberley Ultramarathon**

Dear Tim,

Below is my submission to the “Inquiry into 2011 Kimberley Ultramarathon”, which includes the attached Police Statement made at Box Hill Police Station in the week following the incident on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011. The statement describes a timeline of events on that day as I witnessed them, and I believe it is a true and accurate record which is relevant to the inquiry. It does not specifically relate to any of the particular terms of reference for this inquiry, but is intended to provide a greater understanding of events during the day.

I am a friend of Kate Sanderson and travelled with her to the Kimberleys in September 2011. The main purpose of the trip was for her to compete in the Racing The Planet 100 event, and was to be followed by a week of travelling through the Kimberleys.

I offered my services to Racing The Planet as an event volunteer while Kate was racing, and assisted with setting up the start line, and drove the Race Director – Riitta Hanninen – around the course while she managed the event from the passenger seat. I feel this placed me in a unique position to see how the event was run and to observe what happened during the day.

As a bit of background information on myself, I have been a Boys’ Brigade leader for approximately 13 years (1995 – 2007), running weekly programs and camps for teenager boys. I have undergone Safety and Care training through the Boys’ Brigade and through Scripture Union, and consider that I have a reasonable understanding of responsibilities when other people are placed in your care. However I do recognise there are significant differences between running camps for teenagers and running extreme sporting events for adults. Further, I am a member of the Victorian Rogaining Association Committee, and have been participating in orienteering, rogaining and adventure racing endurance events in bush settings since 1997.

In my police statement, I did not provide comment on my thoughts from this side of things. I have merely provided a timeline of events from what I observed.

I do not specifically wish to appear before the Committee to present any information, but am willing to do so if further information is required following the review of my

statement. Feel free to contact me on [REDACTED] if you need to discuss any element of my submission.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Baker", written in a cursive style.

Andrew Baker

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Attachment: Police Statement of Andrew Baker

## STATEMENT

Name: Andrew Ronald BAKER

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### STATES:

My full name is Andrew Ronald BAKER, I am 35 years of age and I live at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] My occupation is a Civil Engineer.

Over the past three years I have got to know two people through various sporting events involving running, mountain biking and paddling. These people are Kate SANDERSON from Mt Martha and Hal BENSON from Sydney. I actually only met Hal through Kate about 2 weeks ago when we travelled together to Kununurra for the Kimberley Ultra Marathon.

This trip came about after Kate had sent off her entry for this marathon about September or October last year, 2010. Kate had sent emails to all her running friends to try and see if anyone else wanted to do it. I didn't want to run in the event but expressed interest in going up for a holiday and Kate invited me along. Kate and I planned the trip together. Although not competing I contacted the organisers, Racing the Planet, by email and expressed my availability to be a volunteer and to be of any assistance for the event. After having completed the required volunteer application form and further contact via email we came to a mutual arrangement that rather than being a full time volunteer I would be assisting the event manager, Riitta HANNINEN, on course.

On Wednesday the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 2011 Kate and myself flew to Perth where we met up with Hal where I met him personally for the first time although we had sent each other emails whilst planning the trip. On the same day the three of us flew to Kununurra. During the planning, and I guess due to not being an actual competitor, I did not see any detailed information on the event. I assume the organisers, Racing the Planet, would have sent out information packs to the competitors.

The next day, Thursday the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2011, the organisers were holding a volunteer training day but as we had organised a cruise of the Ord River I did not attend the whole training day. I attended the training day in the morning from the start at 10:00am for about an hour during which we all introduced ourselves to each other and outlined our backgrounds but I then left to go on the river cruise. The only official information I received at this time was an Official Competitor Information booklet. Upon returning from the river cruise the volunteer training and preparation was still in its final stages at 7.00pm. From all accounts it was quite extensive.

In the evening on this day there was a competitors briefing starting at about 8.00pm after the competitors had officially registered. I went along to this and on entering the room I noticed a white board with a drawn picture of the course with details showing different elements of the course.

The competitors briefing consisted of 41 competitors and the organisers introduced themselves and went through all the details of the event, like cut off points, what you would be provided with at checkpoints, a course overview and a very basic map. However a map was not really required for this event as the course was well marked with pink tape. As all competitors have to have a back pack these were brought to the registration and fully inspected checking that they contained all the compulsory equipment and required food items.

There were also safety issues addressed part of which was the requirement to have a whistle, however I felt that there should have been actual direction as to how, when & where to use the whistle should an emergency like situation present itself. There were four doctors at the briefing and the doctor in charge, Dr Brandee WAITE, addressed the competitors. Each of these doctors would be spread out at various check points along the course. There were a number of international competitors and the dangers of the Australian bush were discussed, mainly concentrating on snakes and dehydration, however I do not recall any reference to bushfire danger. Other than dehydration which was heavily pushed there were no other real danger elements addressed.

The organisers told competitors that the course would be marked with pink tape, and stressed the fact to follow the pink tape throughout the entire course. It was also mentioned that Carlos GARCIA PRIETO the Course Director who was to be present was actually out remarking sections of the course where the pink ribbons were believed to have been destroyed by previous fires. Other than my issue with the whistle the

Statement of BAKER, Andrew Ronald

rest of the briefing was well conducted and I am sure that each of the competitors left the briefing with a full understanding of what lay ahead of them.

The next morning I got up at 3.45 am and met up with Riitta HANNINEN the event manager, Lon a local volunteer and Melanie HO another volunteer. I do not know Lon's surname. We drove to the start line at Emma Gorge which is about 100 kilometres from Kununurra and set up the race starting area with the appropriate start banner and other advertising flags and banners. At about 7.45 am the competitors started arriving having being bussed out from Kununurra which is actually the finish line. They had a short opening ceremony which included about a 5 minute address to the competitors.

The following is a recollection to the best of my ability as what took place this day.

The race started just before 8:30. The four of us pulled down the start line banners and loaded it into truck which was the car for Checkpoint 7. We drove down to Checkpoint 1, arriving about 5 minutes before the first competitor. We stayed there until the first 10 or 15 competitors had passed through this checkpoint. Lon and Melanie stayed at the checkpoint, and we picked up Nathan Dyer a photographer and correspondent for the West Australian newspaper.

From Checkpoint 1 it was Riitta, Nathan and myself in the car.

We drove along the Gibb River Road to the turn off into Checkpoint 2, stopping every now and again for Nathan to take photos of competitors. This is about 6 kilometres on the Gibb River Road, and it was a further 6 kilometres on four wheel drive tracks into Checkpoint 2. Along the Gibb River Road there were a few live fires, slowly smouldering next to the road however there didn't seem to be any danger to competitors as this road in some areas is 20 metres wide. It was at this time that I could see smoke visible from a number of areas some closeby and some quite a distance away. I wasn't overly concerned as I was aware that it is part of the bush environment in the Kimberleys and other bushland in Northern Australia for there to be a number of fires for this time of the year. As we drove along the track I saw on a number of occasions that areas of bush had been burnt out on one side of the road and not the other side then on others both sides were burnt out. Most of these burnt out areas of bush appeared to

be have been burnt possibly the day before. We arrived at Checkpoint 2 about half an hour or so before the first competitor.

Before the first competitor arrived the media helicopter landed next to Checkpoint 2. I saw people get out of the helicopter who came over to us being the checkpoint officials and went straight over to Riitta and I overheard some of the conversation. I heard the people from the helicopter say to Riitta, "There's a bushfire ahead and it's expected to cross the track in about 1 and a half to 2 hours." Or words to that effect.

I could see Riitta walking around making phone calls and we waited for the first competitors to arrive. As they arrived the helicopter took off and followed the first few competitors into the gorge. I helped at the checkpoint until Riitta wanted to go which was just after Kate (competitor 33) arrived at the checkpoint. At this point it was 11.40 am, I know this to be accurate as I took a photo of her and the properties of that photo show it to be taken at 11:40 am. I don't recall any further mentions of fires at Checkpoint 2.

Riitta, Nathan and myself then drove around to an area known as The Barrels. We got there in time to see maybe the 5<sup>th</sup> competitor come through. He said the fire was getting close to the track. Soon after a group of four came through, including Samantha Gash (competitor 19). They asked if we had any water for them as they had virtually used all they had (not even half way to Checkpoint 3 at The Barrels). Riitta gave them access to as much water as they needed. They also said the fire was getting close to the track and had waited until they were sure the competitor behind them had got through. Certainly there was smoke rising from the direction the competitors were coming, and the smoke seemed to get thicker as we were there.

We saw maybe 3 more competitors come through, saying the same thing about the fire and also being very hot and running low on water. Riitta decided to leave a number of water bottles at The Barrels, and left Nathan there to assist competitors. Riitta and myself drove back to Checkpoint 2. I think we were going back as Riitta was concerned that the course marking ribbons may be burnt by the fire.

We met Carlos, the Course Director, driving out when we were almost back at Checkpoint 2. Carlos was worried about the flames burning out the bush and burning the pink tapes that marked the track. He said they had sent Lon (a local volunteer who

helped with the preparation of the course) into the gorge from Checkpoint 2 with a GPS to help competitors get through the gorge if the tapes had been burnt.

We got back to Checkpoint 2 just before the last competitor came through and the checkpoint sheets will show what time that was. There were maybe 3 or 4 competitors still at Checkpoint 2, re-hydrating. Riitta had a quick chat to the checkpoint volunteers and we took off again, driving back to The Barrels.

A media car was at The Barrels when we got there. Nathan said the people coming through had largely said the same thing about the fire in that it was getting close to the track. He said the most recent competitor had come through only a few minutes ago.

I cannot remember if it was the first time or the second time at The Barrels, but the fire roared up one of the hillsides while we were standing there. I'm pretty sure Nathan took some photos of this which would show what time this was.

Riitta called the Checkpoint 3 and asked them to send the Checkpoint 1 car to The Barrels as a permanent water point. We picked Nathan up as he had stayed at The Barrells when we were there the first time. We then drove along the track to Checkpoint 3 passing a number of competitors along the way.

We got to Checkpoint 3 just as the group of 4 including Samantha Gash were leaving (maybe soon after 2:00). The media helicopter was on the ground at the checkpoint with everyone standing around.

From here on I was not in the car and did not fully hear the radio messages. There seemed to be a few garbled radio messages from Andrea or Brenda being the car at The Barrels, and I am not aware of what they were. Competitors were still coming through Checkpoint 3 for a while.

Eventually the media helicopter took off at about 2.30 to 3pm I believe to investigate things. Maybe the report back from The Barrels was that no more competitors were coming through, because I do not believe any more did and I form that belief in that no competitors arrived at Checkpoint 3 that we had not passed on the track between The Barrells and Checkpoint 3.

A message came from the helicopter reporting two people unconscious however I didn't hear the other details. From here on I tried to avoid listening to the messages coming through as I knew Kate and Hal were still out there and didn't really want to hear any details.

After a little while and a few discussions, Riitta started to drive back to The Barrels with Julie BRAHM, the Checkpoint 3 medical officer, just as the helicopter returned. She stopped and Julie got on the helicopter. From this point I completely avoided listening to radio messages.

Soon after this the gyrocopter flew overhead, and I have heard since they had no knowledge at this point of what had happened. Riitta tried to reach them on the radio but had no luck.

The race was still going at this time and just before the helicopter arrived back Carlos took off on foot towards Checkpoint 4 to put glowsticks along the course to assist competitors in the dark.

Once the helicopter left with Julie, there were only 6 or 7 of us at Checkpoint 3 with three cars. Riitta had 2 stay at the checkpoint, 2 go to the finish line, and the rest drive back along the track to The Barrels. At about 4:15pm myself and Emma SAWYER, a Checkpoint 3 volunteer, went to Kununurra to set up the finish line.

At about 7.30 pm I became aware of a conversation between media representatives and subsequently one of them advised me that competitors had been caught in a fire. It was then that I found out what had happened to Kate and other competitors. One of the media representatives had been involved in driving competitors out from The Barrels and dropping them off at the hospital.

After making arrangements I went to the Kununurra Hospital and on arriving there Hal was walking out the door having been assessed and discharged. He told me that I would not be able to see Kate as she was in a pretty bad way. I took Hal back to our hotel and he told me what happened. He took about 20 minutes to tell me what happened in the most graphic details that I have ever heard before. Not going in to extensive detail it consisted of how he and Kate got caught in the fire and how they tried to get out or out run it. They had met up with 3 others coming back who stayed with them also trying to outrun the fire. After the fire had gone through they further met up with another 3 and then I believe another 2. The last 2 took everyone's name and set off to walk back to



Checkpoint 2. The other 8 stayed where they were to await help. Although the two girls Kate and Turia PITT were seriously injured they remained conscious the whole time.

After Hal cleaned himself up we went to the main hotel where everyone was gathering and we had a meal which was provided by the hotel. I think it was this time that I found out that the race had actually been cancelled. The competitors were arriving at different times and I think the last ones actually came in at around midnight. One of the organisers was letting everyone know that there was going to be a debrief in the morning.

At 10.00 am the next morning, being Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2011, a debrief was conducted at the main hotel where they made a statement which we were told was exactly what was going to appear on the website about a half later after the debrief. The debrief was conducted by Sam FANSHAW and she appeared to be referring to a sheet of paper.

The debrief covered what the organisers had done leading up to the event, including having spoken to the landowners and the people leasing the land. I recall her saying that after speaking to these people they actually had to change the course but I can't recall why. They covered what they did on race day and the steps taken with the onset of the fires, the evacuation of the injured and the assistance given. I also found out that the race had been cancelled at 6.00pm. They then asked if there were any questions to which a few people responded with the main issues directed towards those that were injured, what further assistance was required or the need to provide financial assistance. The organisers then said that should anyone wish to meet in private to express their feelings or criticisms that they would be happy to do so that day. They also said that they wanted to speak to everyone involved to put together an accurate timeline however I spent nearly the whole day with the uninjured survivors, including Hal, who had been caught up in the fire. On this day not one of these survivors was approached or interviewed by any of the organisers.

The communications on race day in my opinion was poor in that I believe Riitta had a satellite phone, and she tried to use this a number of times. While I was driving her

around I did not see the satellite phone work well enough to provide communication from Riitta to any checkpoint. When we were driving back to Checkpoint 2 from The Barrells we met the Checkpoint 1 car and Carlos' car driving out. It was decided with both of these that they would use Channel 10 on the CB's in the cars to communicate. I don't know if this decision was made on the fly or if this was a backup plan. This seemed to work better, although communication from Checkpoint 3 to The Barrells still seemed to be dodgy at best.

About 3 or 4 days ago I received an email from Riitta, the Event Manager, in which she expressed her concern and asked how I was. This is the only contact I have had with the organisers following the debrief.

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(Andrew Ronald BAKER)

Statement taken and signature witnessed by me  
at 5:05 PM on 17/09/2011 at Box Hill

H. VAN ROSSUM  
Sergeant 20201

I hereby acknowledge that this statement is true and correct and I make it in the belief that a person making a false statement in the circumstances is liable to the penalties of perjury.

.....

(Andrew Ronald BAKER)

Acknowledgment made and signature witnessed by me  
at 5:05 PM on 17/09/2011 at Box Hill

H. VAN ROSSUM  
Sergeant 20201