

Submission Number: NND.001.00162

Submission Of: John Paul Hodgson

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my personal situation

What was your personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires?

Where do you live? Kangaroo Island (DC)

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

The coordination between the Country Fire Service on the mainland and KI was effective, as was the integration of private farm units and Parks (DEW) units.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

The complete dismissal of the concerns voiced by the group of senior fire chiefs in early 2019 was nothing short of criminal. The Federal Government was completely irresponsible in its lack of action, particularly in regards to not acting on the recommendation for a significant increase in aircraft and the integration of the ADF. A late response by the PM announcing an additional \$11 million dollars for aerial resources in the future was inadequate and insulting to what was recommended. Re the ADF, when they arrived on the island they were allocated tasks well below their capabilities as trained reservists, as there had been no preparation and training for a response to a bushfire.

I am not sure about the credibility of the following statement, however it is doing the rounds on KI. As the fire started in Flinders Chase National Park, DEW was initially responsible for the response. The word on KI is that when the fire was still contained within the Ravine section of FCNP (south and north of Shackle Rd), local Parks personnel had to request permission from DEW senior staff in Adelaide to allow radical interventions (bulldozing into the affected area and use of sea water for firebombing). What is being said here is that it took several hours for a response to come back from Adelaide by which time it was too late. As I understand in past emergencies, senior Parks staff on KI were able to make these decisions locally.

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

Our family has a 102 hectare heritage listed bush block which was completely burnt out. We lost two houses, several sheds, four rainwater tanks and three large enclosed orchards/gardens. I mention that in the context of the responses which are coming through re "native vegetation management" and "fuel reduction". We are not in favour of seeing any changes in the Native vegetation management legislation here in South Australia. Regarding Kangaroo Island, it must be remembered that this is a special place in the context of not having experienced the wholesale changes in habitat which have resulted in significant loss of biodiversity as has occurred on the mainland. The relatively intact eco-system is the sole reason why KI is the fourth most iconic destination in Australia for those who want to see native wildlife. That is why we are called the Galapagos of Australia. In other words the biodiversity is at the heart of our economy. The agricultural sector of KI are also largely appreciative of this biodiversity, trading on the "clean green image"

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

There are at present emotive responses regarding roadside vegetation and changes to clearance legislation. These must be weighed up against scientific research. I am particularly concerned about the Mayor of KI making unfounded emotive statements and saying he is speaking for the community. Similarly I am concerned regarding the Prime Minister only seeming to want to consider "fuel reduction" Both of these responses ignore "climate change" as the major driver of what is happening. I attended the Royal Commissions forum in Kingscote on March 4th, 2020, where I heard our local CFS senior fire-fighter, who is a farmer state that no amount of vegetation clearance would have had any affect. [REDACTED] stated "this fire was unstoppable" The science must be the indicator, not personal opinions.

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name