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Submission Number: NND.001.00415

Submission Of: [REDACTED]

Your Details

Email address:

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Preferred means of contact: Email

What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise?

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? Bingie Residents Association

Your Submission

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

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

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

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

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

Supporting material provided:

BRA Submission to Federal RC Bush fires.pdf



Bingie Residents Association

17 April 2020

Dear Madam / Sir,

The Bingie Residents Association welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Royal Commission on National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

Following is a collection of thoughts, experiences and suggestions from our residents who all lived through the Black Summer of 2019 / 20. We sincerely your enquires result in a better outcome for summers into the future.

Recommendation

Fund the RFS adequately and give them the best support possible.

Should there be a reassessment of volunteers versus paid staff?

The whole Bingie community knew from the 'Get Ready' weekend that we needed to first decide whether we'd stay and defend our properties, or evacuate.

We knew if we decided to stay we'd have to be prepared to take care of ourselves and our neighbours, rather than expect the RFS to be "at the end of our driveways" as their team would most likely be somewhere else East of the highway fighting the fires.

"Doing an amazing job in such difficult circumstances."

But we all saw the amazing continual work being done by our local brigade. They were always ready to give us the latest info showing hot spots and an accurate wind forecast. In times of dense smoke even their comms went out, which is unacceptable.

“The fire shed was a focal point, a vital source of information”

The RFS became the default hub for information and communications. It would be worth hardening and improving the communications at the Fire Shed,

Currently the fires are just depending on the same systems as all the rest of us.

We were able to make sensible decisions about our safety because of our local Fire Captain, [REDACTED] took the time to give us quality information combined with her decades of experience.

“Our saviours were the volunteers at the Bingie Fire Shed.”

Possibly the fire shed could be developed into a Safer Place for residents seeking shelter from an out of control fire when they are unable to evacuate.

“Overgrown nature needs to be separated from community housing areas.”

Recommendation

Protect and improve vital communication networks so they can continue to function.

It was incredibly stressful to be alert at literally all hours, and even more so when there was no information available.

Once power was lost mobile and internet went, and landlines soon after.

Then when the local ABC radio went off air we were cast adrift, alone in the smoke.

Landlines (our ONLY reliable means of communications here) are being phased out and replaced with.....?

To support a community that is doing its best to look after its own, we need good information on the hot spots, the wind forecast and advice from experienced local firefighters.

The truth is that the main cable that connects Bingie to the world is now lying on top of the ground in dense bushland near Coila Lake, waiting for the next bushfire when the whole district will be cut off once again.

Recommendation

Encourage / enable small local area's to have their own communication networks so they can keep informed.

“COMMUNICATION NETWORKS BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO LIVED CLOSE TO EACH OTHER WAS CRUCIAL. WHEN THE FIRE REIGNITED IT ONLY TOOK A COUPLE OF TEXTS TO KEY PEOPLE AND THE WORD WAS OUT WITH WATER SQUARES AND BUCKETS COMING FROM EVERYWHERE.

IN THE MULLIMBURRA ESTATE (BINGIE) ARE WE HAVE HAD A 'COMMUNAL' EMAIL SYSTEM IN PLACE SINCE THE FIRES A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO.

THROUGH THAT WE'RE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER - WHO WAS GOING TO BE HERE ON THOSE HORRIBLE DAYS AND WHO WASN'T.

THIS REALLY HELPED."

Recommendation:

Cease logging native forests *especially* in bush fire affected areas

This would maintain carbon in trees, assist the recovery of native wildlife and in the longer term help slow the extreme climate change induced weather than lead to wildfires as experienced over this "Black Summer" of 2019 /2020.

Australian National University landscape ecology expert Professor David Lindenmayer¹ advises multiple academic and forest industry studies showed forest thinning in Australia "makes forests more fire prone"

It may seem counter-intuitive but the longer old-growth forests remain fire-free, the less combustible they become. The thicker canopy creates more shade, the undergrowth becomes thinner and less vigorous and holds more moisture - and hence there is less fuel for fires.

The South Coast region has a decades long history of intensive logging making our forests more fire prone and endangering the smaller rural communities like Moruya, Bingi and Congo.

Logging has hastened climate change by releasing millions of tonnes of carbon stored in these trees into the atmosphere when they're logged.

Recommendation: Hazard Reduction Burns

- Plan strategic controlled mosaic burns that focus on asset protection zones around residential areas rather than meeting remote area burn quotas.
- Incorporate landcare manual removal of dry fuel load such as sticks in tree forks, piles of sticks around trees and weeds as well as slashing and brushcutting rather than burning which can escape.
- Controlled burns to incorporate mosaic burning that leaves unburnt patches that wildlife can retreat to and allow flora that is not fire resistant to survive.

Numerous case studies demonstrate that hazard reduction burns weren't effective in the Black Summer fires. Notably the Border fire burnt from the Victorian border to Eden in a single day, through some of the most heavily logged forest in Australia. So even though the fuel load in that forest had

¹ 29 Jan 2020 [Post-bushfire logging makes a bad situation even worse, but the industry is ignoring the science](#) David Lindenmayer

been reduced, the fire simply swept through anyway. Simply burning off more undergrowth isn't going to solve the problem.

Recommendation:

The National Parks and Wildlife Service needs to be adequately funded.

If adequate funding was re- instated for NPWS it would contribute to good land / fire management and pest control practices in our parks - and benefit the tourism industry.

Over the last 9 years NPWS had \$121 million cut from it's budget in 2011, In 2017 an additional \$80 million was cut and the number of rangers employed was reduced by approx 25% (Fact checked by The Guardian).

Previously 28 people were in the role of senior ranger. They had responsibility for hazard reduction and pest control. This role was abolished in a restructure in 2017, effectively replacing rangers with office based clerks - presumably on less pay than rangers with university qualifications and 20 to 30 years experience in the service.

Recommendation: It's imperative that the ABC is properly funded so it can build capacity so the organisation can seamlessly "step up a notch" in times of crisis.

The Bingie area doesn't have complete adequate mobile phone coverage.

So access to the internet is unreliable. The local ABC radio was *the* life line for us during this crisis.

A trusted source of information, their role as the nation's emergency broadcaster was never more important. They provided timely critical information for potential life and death decisions - when to evacuate, when to shelter in place.

Recommendation

That communities be encouraged to build or purchase as a group or individually within 'micro communities' water trailers like the Braidwood Mosquitos. They can be used for watering revegetation or garden projects for most of the year.

Recommendation

Provide tax breaks to encourage installation of fire control devices where town water isn't available - fire carts / water trailers, cement storage tanks, sprinkler systems.

Regards,

[Redacted]

Bingie Residents Association

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