

Submission Number: NND.001.00620
Submission Of: Anthony Talbot Adams

Your Details

Email address:
Phone:
Preferred means of contact: Email
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? Canberra

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?
The volunteer NSW RFS members seemed to work particularly well in extraordinarily extreme circumstances
In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?
Preparedness at the Commonwealth Government level
In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?
1. Commonwealth government level coordination needs to be significantly improved
2. Given the increasing scale and intensity of the bushfire problem, which will continue to worsen and climate change impacts increase, I don't believe the volunteer model will be a viable one for future firefighting. The firefighters need to be permanently employed and paid.
Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?
I will provide a separate written (attached).
Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name
Supporting material provided:
Submission from A T Adams.pdf

To: Air Chief Marshall Binskin and fellow Commissioners

Commission of Inquiry into matters related to natural disasters following the Australian bushfires in 1919/20.

Submission by Tony Adams,
[REDACTED]

Introduction

I make this submission from my perspective as an Australian citizen with a profound interest in the governance of the nation, and the need for careful management and husbandry of our natural, social and economic resources both for ourselves and for the generations to come. I wish the Commission well in its deliberations and trust that its recommendations for action will be well-informed and, just as importantly, acted on by the relevant Government agencies.

I note that the first item of the terms of reference for the Inquiry is as follows:

(a) the responsibilities of, and coordination between, the Commonwealth and State, Territory and local Governments relating to preparedness for, response to, resilience to, and recovery from, natural disasters, and what should be done to improve these arrangements, including with respect to resource sharing;

It is this that I wish to focus on, and in particular the question of “preparedness”.

I would say that “being prepared” means taking actions that will or could avoid or mitigate the impact of a foreseeable future event. The 1919/20 bushfires were unprecedented in scale and intensity and provide a good example of a natural disaster scenario. I believe that it is well established that our Governments, and particularly the Commonwealth Government who have commissioned this inquiry, were ill-prepared for this event. Apart from anything else, the fact that this inquiry is needed is evidence of this. The question that I ask is: could our Governments have been better prepared such that the fires could have been reduced in scale and intensity, or perhaps not have occurred at all?

The answer to this question, in my view, is yes, and if this is the case then it is important that we understand why this occurred to avoid repeating this failure with future natural disasters. And, future fire events are going to become increasingly severe, “resilience” in the face of this will not be enough, we must also address the cause.

Whilst Australia always has had and always will have bushfires, the scale and intensity of the 2019/20 cataclysm was unprecedented; The cause of the increase in scale and intensity was human induced climate change. Whilst some continue to dispute the existence of human induced climate change it is nevertheless a reality established by about 50 years of scientific research and accepted by all credible universities and Government agencies around the world. More importantly, from a Government perspective it is accepted by the CSIRO, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology and the Government Scientist, the bodies to whom the Australian Government should go to in the first instance for advice.

The Commissioners are probably aware of a report commissioned by the Australian Government and published in 2008 by Ross Garnaut (The Garnaut Climate Change Review: Final Report,

Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). Under the heading “Bushfire” on page 288 of his report Garnaut said as follows:

Recent projections of fire weather (Lucas et al. 2007) suggest that fire seasons will start earlier, end slightly later, and generally be more intense. This effect increases over time, but should be directly observable by 2020.

This is but one, particularly prescient, scientific assessment that forecasts the likelihood, and in the absence of mitigating measures, the certainty of a hotter drier Australia leading to increased bushfire risk. Other sources are too numerous to mention but are readily available. Significantly for the question of Commonwealth Government preparedness, this report was commissioned by and for the Australian Commonwealth Government; It was not possible for the Government to have not been aware of it. Its content and recommendations are scientifically sound, stark, and unambiguous. The closing sentence of the report (p597) says as follows:

On a balance of probabilities, the failure of our generation would lead to consequences that would haunt humanity until the end of time.

The Government chose to ignore the Garnaut report; in preparedness terms, the Australian Government has made a decision to remain unprepared.

So, in light of the above, when the Commission comes to the point of addressing the question of “preparedness” as set out in the terms of reference, I ask that you give the matter careful consideration (as I am sure you will) and determine and report accordingly as to whether the following proposition is accurate:

The unprecedented scale and intensity of the 2019/20 bushfires was closely related to human induced climate change and if preparatory action to reduce global emissions had been taken then the scale and intensity would have been reduced.

If we are unable now to acknowledge this past mistake, then I do not see much hope for getting things right in the future. This Commission of Inquiry provides the opportunity for this acknowledgement.

In saying the above, I understand that any action taken by Australia alone to reduce emissions would have only a negligible effect. It is however a nonsense argument to say that Australia should not do anything because our individual influence is minor. Action must be world-wide; we are part of the world community and must play our part if we are to expect other nations to do their share also.

I am available to discuss any of the above or respond to any queries that you may have.

Tony Adams
23 April 2020