

Submission Number: NND.001.00691

Submission Of:

Your Details

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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? I lived in an area affected by bushfires and suffered financial loss

Where do you live? Mid-Coast (A) - Kundibakh

Your Submission

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

Fires near me app

The helicopter surveillance, when it could fly, gave up to date information on the fire ground.

Parks and Wildlife, with their smaller vehicles, were very active and responsive.

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

Delegation – there were considerable delays for on-the-ground Rural Fire Brigade crews while they waited for approval from remote authorities. These delays meant opportunities to control or manage the fire were missed. With so many fire fronts at one time how can those central authorities provide timely and accurate responses to the teams on the ground that allow them to do their job.

Communication - there were severe gaps in communication to on the ground crews, such as the bulldozer driver making containment lines, who had no on-board communication capability. The lack of mobile phone services in the area meant different groups could not be kept in contact and provided with up-to-date information.

Inability to back-burn – one evening there was an opportunity to light a back-burning operation on the Western edge of Kiwarrak Mountain. The fire was burning slowly down the mountain and if a back-burning line was started at the foot of the mountain it may have stopped the fire. Local crews did not have the authority and local property owners were threatened with arrest if they started a back burn. The opportunity went begging.

Size of the Rural Fire Brigade Trucks. - they are too large to get through farm gates and unsuitable for the rough terrain in the area.

Local knowledge - Local Fire Brigades do not know the area very well.

The early start of the Fire Permits to the start of August caught a lot of landholders under prepared with their own hazard reduction burns.

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

More hazard reduction burning is needed.

- All new land holders need training in the use of fire so they have confidence to light fires when it safe to do so. For example, you light a fire late on a winters day when it will burn out when the dew starts to come down.

- The attitude to local landholders lighting fires needs to be more supportive and less accusatory.

- The process to get a Fire Permit needs to be streamlined and less bureaucratic.

- Local Fire Brigade endorsed hazard reduction burns seem to be overly orchestrated with dates set well before weather conditions are known. It would be more efficient to have a few skilled operators, with traditional fire practice and knowledge, who would light fires that would burn themselves out in the right conditions.

Forestry operators should be made to clear all waste material from the forest floor after timber harvesting. A couple of years ago we sold timber from our property to the Forestry Corporation. At the end of their operation there was all the normal waste from the felled trees such as the heads and limbs, etc. They also left behind a large number of logs, in a couple of locations, as they did not make a full-load or were the wrong length and were uneconomical to remove. This left additional fuel on the forest floor when the fires came through. If all the logs and timber waste were removed then it would reduce the fuel on the ground.

Local Fire Brigades would benefit from spending some time visiting and surveying the local areas to become more familiar with the terrain and access points.

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

My mother has lived on the current property at [REDACTED] since 1952 and before that lived at [REDACTED]. The two properties share a small boundary. For 86 years she has lived next to Kiwarrak Mountain and in all her life she has never seen such destructive fires.

There are a number of factors that contributed to this.

- The devastating drought

- The lack of hazard reduction burns

- More people live in timbered areas. Old timers knew you did not have eucalyptist trees anywhere near your buildings. Why are the rest of the community expected to protect people who won't take the most basic of responsibilities for their own safety?
- The country has more timber now. Once cleared country has been left to regrow eucalyptist forest. As my Mother says "cows can't eat trees" but not many people in the area make all their living from farming. As such, the husbandry of the land has changed. The increased timbered and forested areas has resulted in less open country that can be used to fight fires before they are on peoples homes and livelihoods.

The problem is, other than the drought, the other risk factors can be managed and improved by people. It just needs will power to fight against the current ideology.

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