

Submission Number: NND.001.00725

Submission Of:

Your Details

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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?

Your Submission

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

Communication from local RFS members with community was excellent
All forms of communication from Bega Valley Shire Council was excellent
Communications from Marty Webster, RFS liason officer was great with in person community meetings and FB recordings available online
RFS volunteers were awesome, so committed and hardworking to ensuring the safety of their community.
Evacuation centres seemed well run and organised, not glamorous but fit for purpose.
Charities were helpful and understanding during evacuation

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

Slow response from federal government to provide military support and assistance
Fires near me app doesn't seem to update much
Communication during the high alert periods was almost non existent as to where the fire was and how fast it was travelling ie from Victoria towards Eden.
Backup generators not installed for mobile phone towers or community safer places which were needed when power went down and roads cut.
Excavator operators who were being paid from tax payer \$ to clear trees and tracks were helping their mates first. It was who you know. My neighbour had their boundary fence cleared on government owned land, which was obviously free for him and it wouldn't have done any good in a fire as his whole block is bush. We didnt get any clearing because we were not there and had evacuated far away from the fires for 2 weeks with a baby and toddler. We have to pay someone if we want our boundary next to the government land cleared. Also this clearing was on public land destroying forests, habitat etc.
Australia not having enough water bombers considering the number of fires since the start of the season and not getting some more until later in the season at the start of 2020.
Having power and mobile towers out for months and no backup generators or emergency mobile towers set up quickly to enable communication following the disaster to occur.
No coordinated response for wildlife

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

Preparation - More cool burns, learn from the aboriginal culture. Not widespread burns of the forest.
Better land management practices of farmers to retain water in the landscape and improve resilience to drought on property through regenerative agriculture.
Better water management of farmers and also council (there was no water restrictions for town water in the towns of Bega Valley despite being in extreme drought and for the towns to waste water draining the artesian basin which will take a long time to replace the water)
Better land management practices of government owned land, allowing controlled holistic grazing for short periods and areas.
Ensure public land has biodiversity of species not just eucalypts which could involve reseeding burnt areas
Response - Military should have bushfire training as part of their mandatory training and should be able to be deployed in peacetime work to save our country, Australia. If they can shoot guns, fly planes and sail ships and submarines why can't they fight fires and use our tax payer dollars wisely to help our own country rather than spending it always doing military exercises or going to war.
Supplies need to be made based on ABS figures or census to have an understanding of numbers and age demographics of the area for baby goods and what is needed etc. eg. received hundreds of toothbrushes, toiletries etc then didnt know what to do with all the excess goods.
Backup generators and temporary mobile towers available quickly for deployment following a disaster.
Council owned community infrastructure eg. Shipping containers which can be loaned out to areas following a disaster for a period of time then go back to Council or on to the next place for use.
Recovery - needs to be more community focussed with a nominated representative for each area to coordinate the response in a paid position. This would enable someone to understand everything going on and can disseminate the information relevant to each persons individual circumstances instead of everyone wasting so much time researching and trying to figure out for themselves what they are eligible for. There are more important things to do like get council approval and organise rebuilding which takes so much time
At the moment feels like everyone is alone. There are a few people trying to coordinate but find they are helping certain people more than others and helping themselves first to donations.
Too much paperwork and so many applications and forms to complete for assistance due to so many organisations being involved.
DAs and other government fees and charges to rebuild should always be waived for those who lost legitimate approved houses.

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

Please don't cut down large amounts of trees along the road side which are important habitat and asthetic when driving. The risk of trees falling on the road and injuring someone is almost non existant. Don't extend the width of no trees/plants from the road edge by metres and metres this just creates more grass for council to cut and maintain and also encourages more weeds to grow which the council is already not able to control and do their job continually.

Land management practices of farmers needs to change to be more regenerative. They shouldn't be allowed to cut down large amounts of trees which is what they are doing now with the excuse of the fires.

Native animals are important and should not be forgotten in decisions made about bushfires, clearing, habitat destruction, felling old growth trees which are important habitat.

Rules required around NSW Forestry Corporation processes after bushfires in removing timber

People who lost their houses and didn't have Council DA approval in the first place should not be able to get free DA approval and other government fees and charges waived as they didn't follow the rules the first time when everyone else spends tens of thousands \$ and months going through these hoops and processes when they built.

Please don't make the restrictions on building in regional areas or on bush blocks even harder and costlier. We as home owners need to take some responsibility if that is where and how we want to live and if our house burns down because of our decisions well you either have insurance or it is your own fault. I want to live here and have trees and I am not going to blame the council if my house burns down because it doesn't meet the current Bushfire Attack Levels (BAL) due to the age of the building. Nor should I have unnecessary burden to rebuild under new legislation because I choose to live here.

Improved communication / awareness that emergency fire trails are not public roads especially if they go through private property that 4WD and motor bikes are not permitted to use these roads for their leisure.

Maintenance of some fire trails hasn't happened in years so access to fight the fire was restricted at times.

Funding to RFS needs to be appropriate for the size of the area being protected ie hectares as well as population. Although our population is small the area is large.

All RFS volunteers should be paid after an extended period of time continuously volunteering. A volunteer I know looked so exhausted working every day for months but he doesnt get any funding or acknowledgement as he is retired. Only people who were away from their jobs or self employed is eligible for the volunteers allowance.

Small communities are forgotten. Most attention is to the towns along the highways not the people who need help the most. In outlying areas where housing is cheaper, might be less educated and capable, might not have much money or job.

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