

**Submission Number: NND.001.00758**

**Submission Of: Angela E Frimberger and Antony S Moore**

### 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 personal situation

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

Where do you live? Port Macquarie-Hastings (A)

### 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?

We write as a business, Veterinary Oncology Consultants, Pty Ltd ([www.vetoncologyconsults.com](http://www.vetoncologyconsults.com)). We are an information support service for veterinarians, based at Lake Innes on the Mid North Coast of NSW. Our mission is to assist other veterinarians in providing the highest possible quality of life for pets with cancer and their human families, by making evidence- and compassion-based recommendations for their care and providing educational materials. We are a husband-and-wife team, both ACVIM board-certified veterinary oncologists, maintaining an office in our home on a 25-acre rural block, that provides remote consultations to veterinarians located anywhere, by phone, fax, or email, when they are caring for a pet with cancer.

The 2019-202 extreme bushfire event had both practical and professional impacts for us.

As our business is based adjacent to the western side of the Lake Innes Nature Reserve, we were directly impacted by bushfire for several weeks, starting at the end of October and continuing through November 2019. This is a matter of NSW RFS record and there is no need to recite the details; however suffice it to say that our business was closed for approximately three weeks while we were occupied with fire monitoring, preparation and direct firefighting on the property, leading to a substantial loss of revenue (<https://www.vetoncologyconsults.com/blog/voc-2019-bushfire-update>). Our premises were also directly physically threatened on one occasion by onrushing 15-m high bushfire that was stopped 25 m from the edge of the house by NPWS fire fighters. The aftermath of the fire has obviously meant much clean-up, which is ongoing.

Although we specialise in cancer medicine, at VOC we also have a strong commitment to the environment. This is partly an outgrowth of our personal views, but we also see it as a natural extension of our mission as veterinarians...to support the well-being of all creatures.

We take a number of steps as expressions of this commitment, including sourcing our electricity from PV panels and 100% Green Power; using a hybrid electric vehicle as our company car, donating one percent of profits to charity and allocating an additional one percent of profits to a special fund used in generating new knowledge in veterinary oncology and the development of new treatments for animals with cancer. We're very fortunate to be located on a 25-acre property on the mid-north coast of NSW. As part of our stewardship of this land, we maintain native bush over a large proportion of it. And, in 2008 – 2010, VOC donated over 300 hours of consulting time to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program in work on chemotherapeutic attempts to control the Devil Facial Tumour. Against this background, we are deeply pained by the impact of the recent bushfires on wildlife, both on our own property and around Australia. Growing out of that and considering the causes of the severity of the fire and the predicted worsening fire conditions going into the future, we are extremely concerned as veterinarians for the future of Australia's wildlife.

In this Submission, we write in response to the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, specifically in response to:

Paragraph (b),

b. Australia's arrangements for improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions, what actions should be taken to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, and whether accountability for natural disaster risk management, preparedness, resilience and recovery should be enhanced, including through a nationally consistent accountability and reporting framework and national standards;

Paragraph (d),

d. any relevant matter reasonably incidental to a matter referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c).

and Paragraph (f) part (ii),

(f) ways in which Australia could achieve greater national coordination and accountability — through common national standards, rule-making, reporting and data-sharing — with respect to key preparedness and resilience responsibilities, including for the following:

ii. wildlife management and species conservation, including biodiversity, habitat protection and restoration;

Australia has always experienced bushfires; but the 2019-2020 bushfire season in Australia was obviously exceptional. It was both unprecedented and predicted. What made it so extreme, and why was it predicted? In other words, what has changed?

Several things have changed, including population density and distribution, but even more importantly,

THE CLIMATE HAS CHANGED and is predicted to change even further in the future.

Therefore, the most important recommendation we can make to this Commission is that Australia should take the strongest possible action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase drawdown on a national level, as well as take a leadership role in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase drawdown (notably the UNFCCC process); and should do so in the shortest possible timeframe.

Global warming (or climate change) does not, in itself, cause bushfires, and that is in keeping with Australia's long history of natural bushfires. However, it does set the stage for fires to be more severe and more difficult to control when they occur.

Climate change worsens bushfires by

- lengthening the growing season so there is more fuel (plant matter) present
- lengthening the "bushfire season" and reducing the opportunities for hazard reduction activities
- causing rainfall patterns to be irregular and less predictable, and in many areas of Australia, more prone to dry weather and drought, causing the fuel that is present to be more likely to catch fire
- increasing the frequency and severity of heatwaves, which increase the fire risk and the severity of fires that do occur.

It is important to remember that the extreme bushfire event we have just experienced has occurred with only approximately 1C of warming, and our current emissions trajectory would be expected to lead to warming of 3.5C or more by 2100.

For these reasons, we urge the Commission to recommend urgent, ambitious and GENUINE climate change mitigation activity be undertaken by the Australian government without further delay.

In contrast to "adaptation" (resilience, or learning how to live with it), mitigation means actually reducing the severity of climate change - reducing the causes of the problem, primarily greenhouse gas emissions, especially CO2. Although adaptation is certainly important; from a veterinary perspective, mitigation is much more important because adaptation mainly centres around the needs of humans and to a certain extent domestic animals, but does little to reduce risks for wildlife.

In addition, mitigation is actually less costly and more likely to yield side-benefits than adaptation. Mitigation is a fence at the top of the cliff, adaptation is the ambulance at the bottom. Ambulances are much more expensive than fences. Moreover, mitigation is much less costly than adaptation.

Individuals and businesses are encouraged to work hard to minimise their environmental impact. This is important and should continue, but it is not adequate on its own, in the face of industrial scale extraction and emissions. Moreover, it artificially shifts the moral and financial responsibility for climate change onto individuals, when this is a societal problem.

There is a very important piece of "low-hanging fruit". The most important controllable cause of greenhouse gas emissions is fossil fuel extraction and use. Fossil fuels have been important in the development of our culture since the industrial revolution, but they are no longer necessary and should be phased out without further delay. Australia's largest source of fossil fuels emissions is electricity generation, followed by mining, industry, and heating; then transportation. There are many low-emissions alternatives available for many of these industries, which are technically ready and need only to be implemented (importantly, biomass burning, especially wood, does not fall into this category). The only real barrier is political ideology, which may be stoked by vested interests.

Electricity generated from wind and solar sources is already less costly than from new coal plants. Why is our market not shifting away from fossil fuels naturally? Because a transition to renewables is being actively impeded by our federal government, with legislation, misinformation spread by individual MPs, and with billions of dollars a year in subsidies to support a fossil fuel industry that is clearly already past its use-by date. Naturally retraining and just transition for affected workers should be included in the transition; but this is surmountable and no excuse for continuing to delay.

A common reason cited for the importance of continuing to subsidize the fossil fuel industry is the importance of associated jobs. However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports a 27% growth in renewable energy jobs in Australia in the 2018-2019 year, to 26,850 full-time equivalent workers. In comparison, Energy New Bulletin stated that "According to the ABS, average employment across mining and extraction industries combined grew by an average of 11%, equivalent to nearly 24,000 full time jobs in 2018-2019." A recent analysis by the International Monetary Fund found that Australian government effective subsidies to the fossil industries amount to \$47 Billion per year (employing 24,000 full-time equivalent workers), compared to just under \$3 billion per year for the renewable energy industry (employing 26,850 full-time equivalent workers). The IMF further found that removing these fossil fuel subsidies would have significant benefits to the overall economy, including for governments, amounting to an increase of 1.7 per cent of global GDP.

Therefore, emissions reduction and drawdown is urgently needed for the sake of Australia's wildlife. And, many options for achieving this are available and ready; and would be associated with a BETTER ECONOMIC OUTCOME than attempting to maintain the status quo. The status quo will not be able to be maintained much longer in any case, because the climate will continue to change more and more severely. The longer we delay effective collective action, the more expensive, less beneficial and less effective it will be. Thus, the most responsible and prudent course of action is to make the strongest possible effort at emissions reduction, at the fastest possible pace.

We know what the job is. We know how to do it. We just need to get on with it. We are Australians and we can do this.

In summary, as veterinarians, we consider ourselves both well qualified and duty-bound to comment on certain aspects of the Terms of Reference, specifically:

- b. ... what actions should be taken to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters...;
- d. any relevant matter reasonably incidental to a matter referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c).
- f. ways in which Australia could achieve ...
- ii. wildlife management and species conservation, including biodiversity, habitat protection and restoration

Therefore, our primary recommendation to this Commission is that:

Australia should take the strongest possible action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase drawdown on a national level, as well as take a leadership role in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase drawdown (notably the UNFCCC process); and should do so in the shortest possible timeframe.

REFERENCES available on request

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