

Submission Number: NND.001.00773

Submission Of: [REDACTED]

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? East Gippsland Climate Action Network

Your Submission

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

The focus of our response is on the need for urgent action on climate change. Without effective action we will not be able to find sufficient resources to fight increasingly unmanageable and frequent fires. Without effective action on climate change the type of fires we have experienced in the last fire season will be more frequent and dangerous. Other weather events will also be more severe with further increased strain on services.

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?

Urgent action on climate change is required to hold temperatures and associated risk at or near current levels. Unfortunately we have locked in current levels of CO2 for milenia and are making insufficient changes to reduce greenhouse gases. So the outcomes in emergency responses of this Royal Commission will be essential to manage the increased risk we already have. However we must also halt global warming and aim to keep temperatures below 1.5°C. Any increase will have to be factored into emergency planning for essentially unsurvivable conditions in many parts of Australia and the planet.

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

Our response is detailed in our submission which is attached.

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

Supporting material provided:

EGCAN Fire Response.pdf



East Gippsland Climate Action Network
Submission to the
Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements
(usually referred to as the *Bushfires Royal Commission*)

<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/>

East Gippsland Climate Action Network (EGCAN) is a community based group promoting urgent action on climate change. We focus on our region of East Gippsland, but of course we see that national and indeed global solutions are required. Many of our members have been severely affected by the fires; loss of property, loss of income, long term smoke inhalation, and had their lives disrupted for weeks and months as they were forced from their homes and communities by the fire threat. Many are living amongst a blackened landscape, still waiting for permanent housing and property restoration. **Now** all are in social isolation due to the COVID19 pandemic.

The bushfires that impacted much of East coast Australia over many months have caused immense damage to individuals, whole communities, regions and the precious remaining forests in the burnt areas. The British Met office has estimated that global CO2 will rise by 10% in 2020 with 1/5th of the rise solely attributable to our bushfires. ¹

The only way to truly mitigate fires such as those in 2019-20 is to treat global warming as an international emergency, as we have with the COVID19 pandemic. With all stops pulled out we may be able to hold warming at 1.5°C. While we will still have an increase in severity of weather events, the risk will not get exponentially worse, as it will with the Federal Government's plan of only 25-28% cuts to CO2 by 2030.

1

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2020/2020-global-co2-forecast>

In 2008 ██████████ made the prediction that global warming would result in extreme fire weather with resultant bush fires by 2020. While he may seem to have been prescient, he based his predictions on research from multiple organizations including the CSIRO. For example the CSIRO report *Climate change impacts on fire weather in South-East Australia*² (2005) predicted extreme fire weather by 2020. They also identified that this would become even worse by 2050. Astonishingly little effective action has been taken on this and myriad research that has predicted similar dire outcomes.

Indeed, as it is well publicised, more than 97% of climate scientists agree with the evidence showing that burning fossil fuels and releasing long stored carbon into the atmosphere is causing dramatic increases in global temperatures. The consensus is clear. There are also many alarming studies showing that if we do not act decisively in the next decade we may trigger a series of tipping points that will lead to a cascade of dramatic, irreversible changes in our planet.³

There is a great deal of peer reviewed research outlining solutions to this global issue. The key however is to urgently cut greenhouse gases.

The 'unprecedented' fires of the 2019-20 fire season, which burnt from September to March, have been somewhat overwhelmed by the equally unprecedented COVID19 pandemic. However, unlike COVID19, to which we will hopefully develop a vaccine, global temperatures will continue to rise until effective action is taken. There is no vaccine for climate change.

Governments and communities at all levels have listened and acted with a sense of urgency following clear scientific advice in relation to COVID-19. Early decisive action has been central in reducing the scale of future devastation. The same must happen in relation to the clear scientific advice regarding climate change.

The risk with the multiple enquiries into these catastrophic fires is that they will focus on the small picture: mitigation by changed controlled burning, land management practices, fire services staffing issues, equipment etc. These are all, of course important and with the increases in fires as the planet warms, we will need to invest significant capital into these on-ground measures. Unfortunately, wildfires are going to become more frequent and widespread with increased global warming, and once started will be, like the fires we had this summer, unstoppable. We will often have to hunker down and protect as much as we can till they burn themselves out.

² http://www.cmar.csiro.au/e-print/open/hennessykj_2005b.pdf

³ <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>

The only way that we can manage the fires in future is to attempt to halt climate change at less than 1.5°C warming. As the slogan used by climate change activists in Bairnsdale, Sale and Melbourne says *'If this is 1°C warming what will 3 degrees look like?'*. We may have missed the boat to stop global temperatures at less than 1.5°C. We are rapidly running out of time to even stay below 2°C. This state of affairs means that the type of fire season we have just experienced will happen more often. With the further drying of the driest continent, more areas will burn repeatedly. Indigenous species will lose their often narrow ecological niches. More properties, lives, flora and fauna will be lost.

The cost of ongoing inaction will be more than can be imagined; environment destruction, economic collapse, social upheaval, fear, and incredible personal loss. We cannot afford to countenance any more developments that will release carbon into the atmosphere. New coal mines such as in the Galilee basin must not go ahead. The Victorian State governments opening up of land based gas exploration is the last thing we need. New research shows that rather than being less environmentally destructive than coal, gas exploration and production is at least as bad. In fact, fossil fuels will be a bad investment in any case and new fossil fuel startups are almost certain to become stranded assets with negative impacts on our economy as it recovers from the dual hit of immense fires and COVID19.⁴

The current federal government response to climate change with 25-28% emissions reduction by 2030 is actually a plan for global warming of 3-4 degrees.^{5 6}

Climate change has been shown to be significantly affecting the length of the fire season, the severity of the fires and their range. This last fire season has been seen as uniquely destructive and unmanageable. Unfortunately the science is showing us that this is only going to get worse. The only action that will stop this worsening by many orders of magnitude will be urgent action on reducing global CO2 emissions.

Numerous recommendations will be made by impacted stakeholders; individuals, communities, various vested interests, emergency services, scientists, in fact all parts of the communities affected. Many of these will make a difference and may increase our preparedness to deal with increasingly worse fires in future.

For all the words that will be written to the Royal Commission, there is however, only one recommendation that can prevent the risk and intensity of fire increasing year after year. The only measure that will matter will be for every level of government and society to take urgent, effective action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If this is not done we will be pouring more and more money and resources, lives and infrastructure into a losing battle.

⁴ <https://www.marketforces.org.au/?s=Stranded+assets>

⁵ NASA review of IPCC data on difference between 1.5 and 2 °c warming:
<https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2865/a-degree-of-concern-why-global-temperatures-matter/>

⁶ <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/current-policy-projections/>

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