

**Submission Number: NND.001.00778**  
**Submission Of: Ross Harold Hitchcock**

**Your Details**

Email address:

Phone:

Preferred means of contact: Email

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?

please see 4 (four) word documents attached to email submission.

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

please see 4 (four) word documents attached to email submission.

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

please see 4 (four) word documents attached to email submission.

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

please see 4 (four) word documents attached to email submission.

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

Supporting material provided:

Royal Com 2020 2020-04-25 comments.docx

Royal Com 2020 abc bom pred 2020-04-23.docx

Royal Com 2020 abc prep 2020-04-23.docx

Royal Com 2020 bom polar 2020-04-23.docx

## The Royal Commission into National Disaster Arrangements

### Submission

26th April 2020

Ross Hitchcock 52 Williams Rd

Kulnura NSW ph 02043761203

### What worked well:

Bureau of Metrology (BOM) predictions and forecasts.

Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) reporting e.g. Kangaroo Island as a risk August 2019.

Integration through the Emergency Management System of the local government, police, SES, Rural Fire Service (RFS) etc.

RFS Incident Management System (ICS).

Enthusiasm and dedication of Volunteers supported by dedicated staff providing excellent coordination of resources.

Electronic technology when applied correctly.

2018 Equipment standards of the RFS including design of appliances and 2017 cotton based PPC.

Development and supply of information for bushfire preparation and planning.

Coordination and deployment of RFS personnel and equipment across the state.

Fire ground action plans prepared over night for morning briefing.

The enormous amount of time given by self-employed volunteers for RFS requirements.

On farm hazard reduction program.

### What did not work well:

Replacement programme of nonstandard RFS plant and equipment.

The large level of resources required to conduct the smallest of hazard reduction burns.

Technology adaption and interpretation with an over reliance on small screen quick info grabs.

2019 Personnel protection clothing-hot, flimsy, not hi-vis and retained burrs/prickles.

Property manager's preparation of bushfire prevention and emergency plans.

Property identification and access to be suitable for heavy vehicle ingress and egress

NSW Fire and Rescue involvement sometimes more of a hindrance than a help.

Application and level of training in the RFS with on the fire ground training gaps of basic operations.

Interstate plant, equipment and methodology at variance to NSW RFS standards which are perfect.

What needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, and response and recovery coordination for national disasters arrangements in Australia.

Adoption of consistent level of equipment and processes.

Land holders to adopt the guidelines of preparation as per available literature.

Defence personnel to have Basic Fire fighter training.

Defence to have equipment to the RFS standard.

Commonality of technology.

Use of technology without compromising adaptability.

Training to involve qualified teachers and incorporating exercises.

Personnel protective clothing that does not get hot, melt, retain prickles and so thin as to make them useless with so much Velcro and zippers to be impossible. Retain the high vis cotton PPC as issued by the RFS up to 2017.

Ability of landholders to conduct hazard reduction burns that are sustainable and environmentally sound.

Land holders able to get a qualification for fire management to enable an easier hazard reduction submission and implementation.

Work towards emergency preparation and response where jet a1 and diesel are not crucial.

Realisation from all levels of Planning that as more people take up a rural life style many of those same people do not have the resources to prepare both physically, mentally and financially their property for a bush fire. In a lot cases they use their resources to exacerbate an emergency.

Is there anything else?

Years of service-50 as Captain, Senior Deputy Captain & deputy Captain (current). Kulnura Brigade.

Occupation- primary producer. Citrus 20 hectare, and native bushland as land for wildlife 30 hectare.

Fire ground operations. 2018-Dec strike team Qld, 2019-Mar strike team Glen Innes, 2019- Aug to Feb strike teams Dorrigo, Grafton & South Coast (NSW). 2019-August to April 9<sup>th</sup> (grass fire) 60 days.

2019 Fire activity impacting Kulnura Nov to Dec- 3 mile, Gaspers Mnt, Wrights Ck and Rugby track.

Substantive role designation in the above RFS operations- senior officer, strike team leader, heavy vehicle driver-bulk water, fire appliance response driver and heavy plant coordinator.

Number of days for operational necessity in 2019= 100 (including training, maintenance etc.)

The drought and associated climate variables and extremes destroyed most of my crops from 2016 leaving me with a skill set of time and ability for RFS operations.

The first RFS state training modules were developed in the 1980's with a significant local input of myself with proof reading and video preparation and forms the foundation of the current training manual.

I make the following observations:

With 1<sup>st</sup> Australian cultural burning it is a good premise but in the current landscape needs an enormous amount of human activity per Hectare and skill to prevent injury and control to protect habitat and fire escapes. The aboriginal population needed fire wood and other resources and had no means of controlling the fire edge except by previous fires within the last 12 months.

The fire season was for all of 2019 with most parts of the state having areas of vegetation dried out to the point of where hillsides of native timber were dead. Live trees had the usually moist pulp cores so dry that within a few minutes of a fire running up the bark the core was also igniting.

After returning from deployments I advised that people should take seriously property preparations as these fires are not stopping and do not get in front of them. I strengthened my preparations by putting underground power supplies, replacing old water mains and dedicating large water supply tanks for static water supply and improving access to a large water supply for RFS tankers. A plan involving family and neighbours was finalised as per the literature as it was expected that I would be otherwise engaged, I then ran test exercises to ensure operational effectiveness. The cost in terms of money and time was rewarded as all systems were used extensively.

Further hazard reduction burning is allowed on rural properties and I take advantage of this to do strategic areas. These areas are not large but requirements both officially and environmentally desirable require considerable effort for a small outcome. I wish to make the point that property tidiness and preparation adjacent to critical assets are more important than burning off larger areas.

Frequently I hear comments that “they” should burn off usually directed at public assets but when reminded that “they” will involve myself doing it and not getting paid the comments are muted.

Finally my view is that scientific evidence of climate change by human endeavour is real and has made the drought more intense and the Antarctic inversion event compounded our natural disaster.

The magnitude of the fire activities across the state was beyond the normal resources of the RFS and abnormally extra effort from all agencies was able to be applied. In this context mishaps and counterproductive actions happened but overall the structure worked well.

Included with this submission are screenshots of three ABC stories that support some of my observations.

Thankyou

Ross Hitchcock

← → ↻ abc.net.au/news/2019-09-06/rare-weather-event-over-antarctica-drives-hot-outlook/11481498

Print Email Facebook Twitter More

## Rare weather event over Antarctica driving Australia's hot, dry outlook

ABC Weather By [Ben Deacon](#)

Posted 6 Sep 2019, 6:31am

### Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD): **Positive phase**

**PHOTO:** A positive IOD is associated with a reduced chance of rain. (Supplied: Bureau of Meteorology)

Dr Watkins said the impact of the SSW may be felt in Australia through to the end of the year.

"These sudden stratospheric warming events and the patterns that we see from them can go from September [to] October, sometimes persisting through to January," he said.

Dr Hendon said he was gratified the Bureau of Meteorology's computer models were able to predict the event.

"In 2002 we didn't even know about it until after it happened, and we didn't know if we would ever be able to predict it," he said.

"It's exciting for us now that we have predictive capability that we didn't have in 2002."

Print Email Facebook Twitter More

## Bushfire outlook for 2019-20 not good news, but will we heed the warnings?

ABC Weather By [Kate Doyle](#)  
Updated 28 Aug 2019, 2:05pm

**The country's top emergency officials have today warned of the dangers of the impending bushfire season, imploring the public to make sure their disaster plans are ready.**

The 2019 Bushfire Outlook outlines the potential threat for each state and territory, yet despite all the uniforms, the stern tone and sincerity of the warnings, many of us will not take action.

"Our research shows that whenever we go into communities post events, a large proportion of that community are not well prepared for the fire season," said Dr Richard Thornton from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC).

"A lot of people were surprised that they were impacted by fires."

So why do some people not heed the warnings, and why are so many of us unprepared to deal with disaster?

RELATED STORY: [What makes a horror fire danger day?](#)

RELATED STORY: [What the prescribed burn window closing means as we go into peak fire season](#)

RELATED STORY: [Wildlife struggling to cope with bushfires coupled with habitat loss](#)

### Key points:

- There's above-normal fire risk along much of the east coast, as well as parts of SA and WA
- Officials in NSW equate the risk there to 2013, when 200 homes were lost in one afternoon in the Blue Mountains
- Experts say there are many reasons why people still don't heed warnings or have a disaster plan

← → ↻ abc.net.au/news/2019-08-28/bushfire-outlook-not-good-news-but-will-we-heed-the-warnings/1143

### How do people respond on the day?

Dr Josh Whittaker, from the University of Wollongong and also part of the BNHCRC, would not say that most people ignored warnings, rather that they often sought further information "confirming a warning" before taking action.

"People will either seek to observe the fire for themselves, which may involve travels through or to the fire-affected area, or they'll try to confirm the accuracy of the warning with somebody who might have more information than them," he said.

"So they'll often try and approach neighbours, friends, fire and emergency services to try and confirm whether the warning is relevant to them and making a risk assessment of how likely they are to be affected."

Dr Taylor said this could include accessing everything from official online sources to more community-based platforms like Facebook.

"Looking at social media [is] actually being really useful for that immediate, first stage after an emergency when people are wanting help or information or are concerned about friends and family," she said.

"Social media can be really useful from a point of view of getting messages through."

So don't think you are silly for posting on social media or calling in to the radio station during an emergency.

### What to do if bushfire threatens



ABC Emergency has sourced advice from official agencies on how to plan for a bushfire, including preparing a survival kit.

The fires in 2018-19, along with prescribed burning, have reduced fuel loads in **Tasmania**. Nevertheless, large-scale fires are anticipated in the state's east.

"Rainfall deficits on the east coast will lead to above-average incidents of fire for those regions," said Bruce Byatt from the Tasmanian Fire Service.

Andrew Stark, Acting Chief Officer for the SA Country Fire Service, said every community across the state faced hot, windy days with the potential for fast-moving fires.

"This outlook highlights a number of areas in **South Australia**, particularly in Kangaroo Island and the Eyre Peninsula, but of course each summer right across SA."

The forecast for **Western Australia** is an above-average fire risk for the whole of the state.

"This fire season backs on to what have been three fairly mild seasons in WA, but we are asking the community to be prepared," said DFES Deputy Chief Commissioner Craig Waters.

Meanwhile, the **Northern Territory** is already in its fire season. The dry conditions have led to reduced growth, but conditions are expected to remain normal until the wet comes to offer some relief.

## Be vigilant

Whether you live in an above-average fire region this year, it still pays to look out the window.

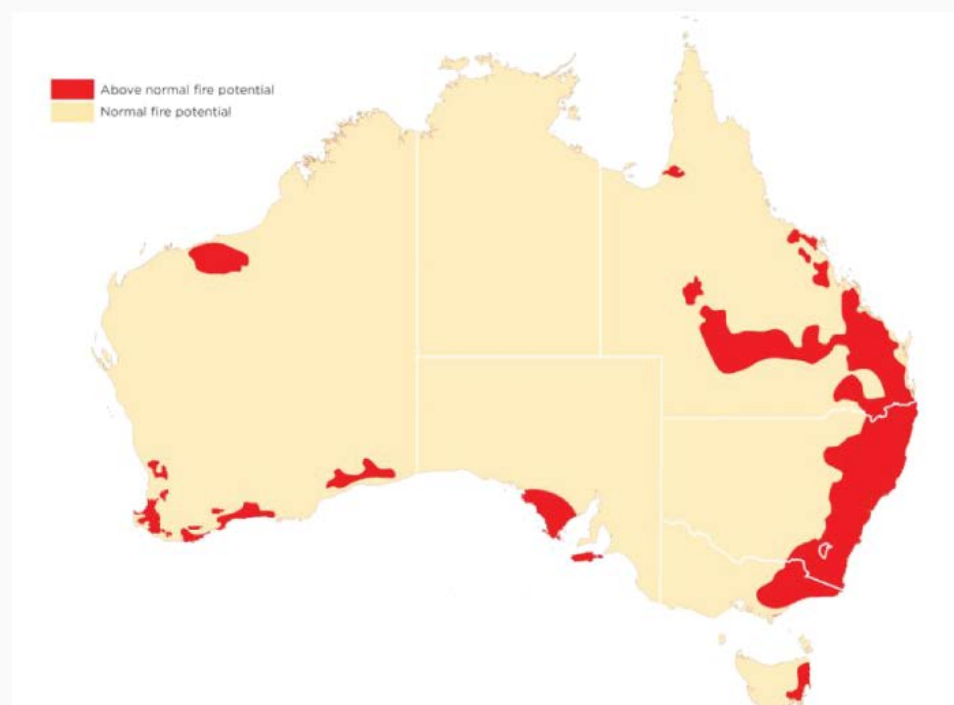
Dr Whittaker urged people not to rely on receiving a warning.

"We have fantastic technology and we have really good systems in place to ensure that people receive a warning, but it's possible, and in some fires we see, that people are needing to respond without a warning," he said.

## Finally, the outlook

Despite most people wanting to check the warnings for themselves, Dr Whittaker said information like the fire danger conditions before a fire "can be helpful in encouraging people to prepare".

Cue the outlook — please don't be scared to the point of inaction, or consider reading this as your mental tick for disaster planning for the season ahead.



The air above Antarctica is suddenly getting warmer

Not secure | bom.gov.au/climate/updates/articles/a035.shtml

Australian Government  
Bureau of Meteorology

HOME | ABOUT | MEDIA | CONTACTS | Enter search terms | Search

NSW | VIC | QLD | WA | SA | TAS | ACT | NT | AUSTRALIA | GLOBAL | ANTARCTICA

Bureau home > Climate > Recent climate > Climate updates > The air above Antarctica is suddenly getting warmer

## The air above Antarctica is suddenly getting warmer – here's what it means for Australia

Issued 9 September 2019

re | bom.gov.au/climate/updates/articles/a035.shtml

still shines).

As the sun shifts southward during spring, the polar region starts to warm. This warming causes the stratospheric vortex and associated westerly winds to gradually weaken over the period of a few months.

However, in some years this breakdown can happen faster than usual. Waves of air from the lower atmosphere (from large weather systems or flow over mountains) warm the stratosphere above the South Pole, and weaken or "mix" the high-speed westerly winds.

Very rarely, if the waves are strong enough they can rapidly break down the polar vortex, actually *reversing* the direction of the winds so they become easterly. This is the technical definition of "sudden stratospheric warming."

Although we have seen plenty of weak or moderate variations in the polar vortex over the past 60 years, the only other true sudden stratospheric warming event in the Southern Hemisphere was in September 2002.

In contrast, their northern counterpart occurs every other year or so during late winter of the Northern Hemisphere because of stronger and more variable tropospheric wave activity.

### What can Australia expect?

Impacts from this stratospheric warming are likely to reach Earth's surface in the next month and possibly extend through to January.

Apart from warming the Antarctic region, the most notable effect will be a shift of the Southern Ocean westerly winds towards the Equator.

For regions directly in the path of the strongest westerlies, which includes western Tasmania, New Zealand's South Island, and Patagonia in South America, this generally results in more storminess and rainfall, and colder temperatures.

But for subtropical Australia, which largely sits north of the main belt of westerlies, the shift results in reduced rainfall, clearer skies, and warmer temperatures.

Past stratospheric warming events and associated wind changes have had their strongest effects in NSW and southern Queensland, where springtime temperatures increased, rainfall decreased and heatwaves and fire risk rose.

The influence of the stratospheric warming has been captured by the Bureau's climate outlooks, along with the influence of other major climate drivers such as the current positive Indian Ocean Dipole, leading to a hot and dry outlook for spring.