

Submission Number: NND.001.00788

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? My farm is in an area affected by bushfires. I wasn't evacuated however suffered financial loss. and we suffered

Where do you live? Mid-Western Regional (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?

Common issues affecting all Communities and fundamental issues the Inquiry / Commission should consider.

i) The reaction time by RFS and /or NPWS after detection of fires. As an example in the case of the Gospers Mountain according to local landowners the fire started by a lightning strike that was detected on a Saturday yet no action was taken by NPWS until the following Tuesday. A watch and wait attitude appears to have been taken by NPWS. The fire event was then taken over by the RFS.

- Who made this decision?
- Was this the case in other locations with other fires? If there were delays then why?
- The reaction time and choice of reaction measures should be examined.
- Whether the measures taken in fighting, particularly in the early stages of each of the major fires, were the correct reactions.
- Did many of the fire outbreaks in National Parks take hold due to a failure (because of policy) by NPWS to back burn at an early stage in the fire event?

ii) The organisational structure of the various authorities and the management of the fire fighting strategy. Local RFS teams know their own area, the property owners, access points and the geographical limitations. They should be in the forefront in decision making of all operations in their respective areas.

iii) What resources were lacking and are needed in the future and where should bases for these resources be located

iv) National Parks and State Forests need water supplies within their Parks that they should use to fight fires. These dams or water points should be accessible by ground crews and helicopters. If the topography within various Parks prevents retention of water and access by crews and helicopters then joint ventures should be considered with adjoining owners or properties in close proximity where large dams may be built to secure water for livestock production and fire fighting.

According to the Olinda locals at no time in the case of the Gospers fire did the RFS or NPWS use water from Dunns Swamp which is within the Park. They relied on taking water from private properties or the filling pump at Olinda. The water used by the helicopters to save the last remaining stand of Wollemi Pines came from a private dam.

v) There should be a cleared tree and foliage setback area of at least 50 meters wide within the National Parks and State Forests from boundary fencing with private landowners. On smaller holdings (house blocks and hobby farms) the landowner is required to setback new homes a specific distance from the boundary however if this boundary is with a National Park or State Forest there is no requirement for either of these two authorities to have a setback on their side for trees.

vi) Greater control of regrowth and more regular and extensive control burns.

vii) Fire trails and roads within the Parks to be kept clear for use of the public and obviously for quicker and safer access in times of fire.

viii) Improved mobile phone services so that warnings, coordination of action and safety may be met.

ix) Detailed maps of all areas adjoining the Parks. Details of ownership, contact details, accurate information on access points and water availability.

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

Urgent requirements for all communities.

9. The Federal and State Governments should agree immediately to payment for the replacement of all fences damaged by the fires.

Irrespective of whether the fences were boundary fences with State Forest or National Parks or whether they are internal property fences the costs should be met by Government grants immediately.

I'm not privy to what payments are or aren't reaching victims for loss of homes and other buildings and equipment however it is clear that even if the Governments are not prepared to acknowledge a legal responsibility for the fence losses due to the source of the fires being in Parks & Forests then at least the Grants should be made in the same manner as other property related damage.

The NSW State Government has recently provided grants to a total of \$209 million for fencing adjoining all Government owned land including National Parks. The amount per property is based on a maximum of \$5,000 per kilometer of fencing adjoining the Government land. This amount is too low and in the case of National Parks boundaries is less than the \$7,000 per klm that NPWS were agreeing to with affected landowners up until the 12th April 2020. The State and Federal Govts need to increase the amount and to pay fully (materials and labour) for all fencing damaged by the fires, most of which started with lightening strikes on Government land.

10. All boundary fencing adjoining National Parks, State Forests and other Crown Land should be Exclusion Fencing to prevent the movement of feral and native animals into private properties. The cost of supply and installation of this fencing should be met by Government.

11. The Federal and State Government Inquiries are already underway with the Lithgow Community meeting being on 11th March. I suggest that many Communities such as Olinda were not aware of these forums nor are they prepared to offer structured comments and advice to the

members whilst they are still battling with the ramifications of the recent events including disputes with their local authorities. I'm also concerned that the Federal Terms of Reference, although it does refer to 'response', covers many other politically pointed issues. I'm particularly concerned that both the Federal and State Government Inquiries will place too much emphasis on the cause of the fires being blamed on 'Global Warming or Climate Change' rather than the community need and responsibility to manage its assets including water, forestry and rural lands through varying climatic conditions.

I understand the Prime Minister has requested a final report from the Royal Commission by August this year which I think is unnecessarily tight. The need for a report into the causes and planning for future events is clearly not urgently needed. The likelihood of such an event in the near future and the ability to react and respond to it as a result of any urgent Inquiry is not required when we look at the wide and extensive destruction of the Tablelands and the Coast that will take years to recover.

What is now needed is:

- (a) An extension to the deadline for input from the affected communities
- (b) All Community Associations in fire affected areas to be contacted directly about these State and Federal Government Inquiries
- (c) Contact details to be supplied by Government to all Community Associations in the fire affected areas so that they may communicate with each other and provide a detailed and coordinated response to the Inquiry
- (d) An extension of time by the Prime Minister for the required report.

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