

Submission Number: NND.001.00817

Submission Of: Greg Franklin

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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? Surf Beach, NSW, 2536

Your Submission

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

There were no areas of the emergency response that worked well. The disaster was made significantly worse by the actions of all agency's.

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

Where do I start!

- 1: we received no warning, even though it was apparent to us the night before that the situation was untenable. Local knowledge was obviously not being used by the co ordination centre.
- 2: Response of fire crews on the day was haphazard. I could see fires approaching my home from multiple fronts. Crews were literally driving in circles. I was informed by members of the local crews that they were constantly being told to move from one point to another, and not able to stop and fight. This was obvious to us on the ground. Like wise helicopters and planes were dropping water in a haphazard manner. Again it is obvious that the central command point were overriding local knowledge.
- 3: We were left to try and fight the fire on our own, even as helicopters circled. I failed to save my home, in a residential street.
- 4: Evacuation points were not accessible due to vehicles blocking the entry.
- 5: Once I reached the evacuation centre I had no assistance in finding my wife and children, who had left early in the morning. I eventually found them at another makeshift evacuation centre. Both centres were under threat, and totally inadequate for the task. My family had no idea if I was alive, and in a distraught state, as they, and others, had been told been told that Surfe Beach was too late to eave and lives had been lost.
- 6: NOTE: SURF BEACH IS NOT EVEN LISTED AS A CHOICE FOR THIS SUBMISSION, DEMONSTRATING HOW LITTLE UNDERSTANDING IS STILL HELD.
- 7: From there things progressed downhill rapidly as people from outside the region took over. I subsequently met with our local state member and heads of the various charities, who agreed with my assessment that in the future a locally coordinated response should be implemented rather than a remote response. This requires explanation at a more appropriate time than this submission allows.

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

Again, Where do I start!

- 1: Local knowledge to be employed over State central decisions. If this had happened months before the disaster would not have occurred.
- 2: Federal, State and Local Governments MUST ensure that all appropriate measures, already legislated, are enforced. For example This fire would not have been as damaging if the NSW Government had ensured clean up after logging activities had been carried out, like wise crown land and national park should be regularly mechanically cleaned, rather than reliance on burn offs. I now live next to Crown Land that should, and can be cleared of fuel load resulting from the fire. This is the most significant matter that can be enforced to mitigate future events.
- 3: Response should be locally co-ordinated. Each LGA can easily have members of the community, with a paid management team on stand by. This team can also ensure that Federal, State and local ordinances are followed. It should be an independent group, and not constrained in its ability to undertake its role. Funding by Federal, State and Local governments.
- 4: Again, this means of submission limits the ability to adequately respond in a meaningful way. Recovery coordination should be locally driven if we are to have any chance of moving forward. For example, I instigated the deployment of Mental Health teams after contacting A NSW Mental Health Commissioner. This person could not see the need for deployment of teams this early, but I convinced him otherwise. Likewise I contacted CEO of Headspace and worked with him in bringing a Headspace team in months earlier than planned. Again, this was not seen as a requirement from those outside the region. Months later it has been recognised that early Mental Health assistance is a must. But, this should be by local people, under local coordination, in future responses. These are only two examples. I will not even begin to outline the multitude of factors that are causing so much unnecessary trauma in this so called recovery that I have tried to, and managed to address for myself and my community.

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

This disaster was avoidable. If all levels of Government, and their agencies had operated as they were formed to do I would not have lost my home, nor would hundreds of others. For too long decisions have been made from political perspectives rather than social and community perspectives. We are now paying the enormous price of these political decisions and appointments. The Commission must approach every person who suffered significant loss in these fires and invite them to meet in person. We have been pushed aside for too long. Too many lives are being lost as the affects of the fires are compounded by the current pandemic. It is time to listen to the people.

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