

Submission Number: NND.001.00826

Submission Of: Terry Poole

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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? Glenn Poole Contracting Pty Ltd - Logging Contractors & Land Owners

Your Submission

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

The bushfire emergency response was limited to trying to protect homes/property. As far as actually responding to the "bush" fires - the response seemed to be "let it burn because we don't know how to stop it."

The RFS's response to protect property, while admirable, had no affect on fighting or containing the bush fires - through no fault of the volunteers who make up the service. Unfortunately, the RFS no longer comprises of competent experienced forestry crews and plant operators who know and understand the bush and have the skills required to prevent and mitigate the effects that bush fires create.

The NSW Forestry crews had a good understanding of containment and responded well in facilitating plant operators to establish fire breaks to attempt to control fires.

It is virtually impossible to stop bush fires when given prolonged hot dry weather with little to no preparation (no vehicular access or routine back burning) and years of fuel build up to burn.

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

The biggest problem with the bushfire emergency response is the complete lack of preparation for the disaster over the last few decades.

Absolutely critical was the lack of access into these bush lands areas. Fire trails and access roads in National Parks and Conservation areas have been neglected and locked up. Our first hand experience as bulldozer operators hired to establish firebreaks in our area was to open up trails that should have been open already. Critical time wasted and criminally, when opportunities presented themselves to back burn from strategically safe positions and put out the fires - permissions was declined!

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

All areas of bushland, National Parks in particular, need to have routine and extensive fire trail management. That means plant operators keeping the tracks open and readily accessible. Locked gates should be removed which will encourage community use of trails which will also facilitate road maintenance on a broad scale.

Routine extensive burning should be conducted yearly to manage the fuel levels on the ground - cattle grazing would also reduce the build up of fuel on the ground.

Practically experienced personnel need to be heading these preparation and mitigation decisions, people with actual life experience that qualifies their instructions.

Less red tape and interdepartmental collaboration that complicates and hinders good practices. Constrictive "red tape" processes delaying and more often preventing forestry burning off, in conjunction with the requirement of impact studies and reports before burning off can be approved is a costly and detrimental process.

Approval to clear trees and bushland around homes to give greater areas for fire breaks.

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

The extent of damage that these bush fires created was preventable.

Increased areas of National Parks, Conservation Parks and Reserves with an emphasis on preservation resulting in no burning off or fire trail management, which in turn is resulting in a continuing increased accumulation of fuel and a lack of access hindering rapid vehicular responses to fires contributed exponentially to this disaster.

There is an overwhelming increase in "locked gates" particularly in National Parks preventing community based exploration which leads to individual management, ie 4WD enthusiasts and the like keeping tracks open enabling emergency response crews access.

The removal of cattle grazing in many Conservation Areas and National Parks once helped maintain lower fuel levels which was another contributing factor that enhanced the detrimental effects of these fires.

Ridiculous "Green" Council regulations preventing adequate bush clearing to protect homes and properties from bush fires - this overwhelming "Green" mentality from local councils in particular which is supporting the dangerous philosophy that locking up all the bush will save all of Australia's' wildlife and native habitat - these 2019/2020 bush fires proved without a doubt how wrong this policy is.

Locking up the bush is not a form of management - if this doesn't change, we can expect more bush fires of the same level of this disaster.

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