

Submission Number: NND.001.00841

Submission Of: Long Beach Community Association Inc

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? Long Beach Community Association Inc

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?
Local response from LBRFS and surrounding fire units was extraordinary.
Regular briefings at the local fire station were the most reliable source of up-to-date information.
"Fires near me" website was very useful but can be improved to up-date more regularly
"NSW Live Traffic" site was useful but slow to update when people needed up-to-the minute information to evacuate.
Exceptional community spirit and neighbourliness were evident.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?
Loss of communication due to infrastructure vulnerable to fire damage
Loss of power due to infrastructure made vulnerable by un-managed undergrowth and lack of regular back-burning
Uncoordinated / ad-hoc evacuations due to failure in established protocols and lack of regular practice runs
Lack of crews equipped and coordinated to deal with ember attack and spot fires
Social media misinformation in the absence of timely official communication
Too heavy a reliance on information technology which not all (elderly and disabled) are able to access
Poor information technology in regional areas
Lack of a back-up plan to relieve embattled RFS volunteers fire fighters and local government dealing with evacuations

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?
The historic lack of support from State, Federal and Local governments to the efforts of concerned citizens and the RFS to mitigate the risk from the long term buildup of vegetation and fire load in the NSW native forests was a major contributing factor to the extent and severity of the fires locally
Lessons in fire mitigation that should have been learned by the government from the recent fires in Tathra NSW and elsewhere were ignored.
The balance between environmental objectives and safety issues must be reconsidered as environmental legislation has for many decades been slanted in favour of protecting and preserving vegetation, with little or no consideration given to the primary goal of government which is the protection of life, property and wellbeing of its citizens.
Government must take steps to educate Australians on the reality of living in an environment with extensive native forests. These must be made safe by regular hazard-reduction burns to reduce fuel load. A frequent comment by RFS was that they had been pilloried by the press in the months leading up to the crisis, for creating a smoke haze during hazard reduction burns, which inconvenienced residents.
A review of local council regulations on the application of state environment legislation should allow farms and bush housing in the vicinity of state forests, to create a safe cleared area and enable access for RFS units to undertake fuel load reduction burns on a regular basis.
Road planning must be adapted to avoid the unacceptable disruption to the lives of regional Australians that resulted from insufficient safety factors built into the design and maintenance of major highways, such as the Princes and the Kings Highway, that were closed for extended periods during the fires.
The loss of communications and power attributable to the vulnerability of networks caused by fuel build up in the surrounding forests was a major contributing factor to the trauma experienced by many residents
Forestry operations with slash and abandon practices, as has occurred in the Benandrah State Forest and Mogo State Forest, must in future include drastic reductions to fuel loads after logging is completed. (No mining license is granted without arrangements for land to be rehabilitated, the same must now apply in forestry). The Long Beach Community Association's concern over the fuel loads left by forestry operations along the highway between Durras and Batemans Bay is shared by our neighbouring community associations.
The government must consider whether the current Rural Fire Service volunteer system, with fractured resources scattered across thousands of sites, should be reinforced by an elite service organised along the lines of the Army Reserve, as we are to face similar or more severe fire conditions in the future
Less catastrophic outcomes could be achieved with improved monitoring during high risk periods and the deployment of rapid response teams structured to serve in strategically located firefighting units, able to be deployed by air, land or sea, and trained and equipped to provide best practice levels of blaze containment in all terrains. Even the largest and most damaging bushfires start with small, localised flames and the best prospects for extinguishing are in the hours following ignition.
To provide the scientific basis for decision making at Federal and State government level, we advocate a Federal centralised service that will forensically investigate each and every major bushfire in the future, to determine causes and factors contributing to both its spread and its eventual containment, in order to develop a database for the study of fire mitigation and provide government with information which will allow improved prediction, response and mitigation in future bushfire seasons

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

Consideration be given to the study of such fire management techniques as practiced by first nations, incorporating practitioners into RFS existing structures and applying this knowledge in hazard reduction burns before coming fire seasons.

In the aftermath of the fires, properly licenced pile burns were being reported to emergency services (000) and subsequent alerts sent via "Fires Near Me" app. This cascades into a flurry of social media posts and a heightened sense of insecurity among residents. We urge the RFS and State government to find a solution to this ongoing issue.

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