

Submission Number: NND.001.00854

Submission Of: Carolyn More

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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? I was not evacuated nor given warning to prior to the fire; fought the fire at my home, suffering personal and financial loss

Where do you live? Bega Valley (A)

Your Submission

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

The Local (voluntary, 'un-official') emergency centre at Cobargo Showground, was a lifeline for the Cobargo community, including my partner and myself, for weeks following the fire on New Year's Eve, 2019.

The local RFS firefighters were amazing-but sadly, they could not be everywhere at once.

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

The Warning system did not work well. I received both a 'Leave now' and 'it's too late to leave' txt message simultaneously, after we were already fighting the fire, which we had woken up to at 4am. Although I had the Fires Near Me app, it had indicated the previous night that we might get some ember attacks- though even they were mapped outside our area [REDACTED] Cobargo).

When the shed at the back of the Catholic Church next door caught fire, I rang 000. Message taken but no Fire crew came.

***Very importantly while my partner and I were in the middle of fighting the fire at our property (also the neighbouring church, Presbytery & 2 neighbours properties- we were the only people remaining) the town water was switched off (diverted- don't know where to?) with no warning. It did not come back on for days. Fortunately we have a small tank so resorted to that and buckets, but being within the town-water boundary we had expected to have town water. Even with our tank, it really placed us in a precarious and unexpected situation. It was one of my scariest moments in what was a rather terrifying night/day.

After the fire, with the exception of two fire crews that came through to help us put out some large trees which were still alight, we didn't see anyone else for days-keeping up to date via radio as no water, power, phone, internet. We checked on the nearby farm (across the road from us) where we knew people had stayed, but no one checked on us, which made us feel very vulnerable. We are quite new to the area, and mainly just knew our elderly neighbours who we helped to evacuate. It would be good if some mechanism of checking on residents post-fire could be developed for the future.

Because the roads/bridges were blocked, we were unable to get water and other supplies for some days. Other people had no or limited fuel- which was not available for 7 days in Cobargo-so were unable to travel to some of the evacuation centres suggested.

Also Cobargo's official evacuation centre (the School of Arts hall) was a wooden structure, and its adjoining toilet block suffered fire damage, & neighbouring properties burnt down completely... Obviously not a safe building in this instance!

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

As/above

+ The fires of New Year's Eve were exceptional in many ways and unexpected to hit the township of Cobargo-for example. However the fuel loads were great, temperatures very high in the lead up to the fires, and so the fires themselves were expected in bushland- if not in town. Scientists are warning that Climate change is contributing to these fire-potential scenarios in new ways and I think it must be considered seriously when planning for 'new normals' into the future, please.

In December 19, 2019, Australia recorded its highest average maximum temperature of 41.9C (Nullarbor in South Australia recording the hottest December day on record at 49.9C). Last year (2019) was also the hottest year on record in Australia, according to Bureau of Meteorology data (followed by 2013,2005,2018 and 2017).

Professor Mark Howden, the director of the ANU Climate Change Institute, was in no doubt as to the main cause of this increasingly hot pattern:

'The continued rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, caused mainly by burning fossil fuels, was the underlying driver of the heat. ... It's very clear that greenhouse gas emissions are changing the radiation balance of the Earth. Other contributors are minor in comparison.'

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

Surreality (Cobargo: 31.12.2019)

Escaping eucalypt-leaves
dropping black and silent,
descending, dark, rain-like
charcoal-coloured leaf-litter
falling from nowhere...

Homeless.

A stirring of smoky-stillness
quickly picking up pace,
smouldering, swirling, choking
compass-less-cauldron
incanting hell, boiling over, escaping...
Fearless.

Flames from the heavens
exploding like shooting-stars,
searing, scorching, exhausting
incessant ember-attacks
igniting halos of fire...
Relentless.

Unforgettable (NYE) fireworks
lighting an eerie darkness,
lava-orange, blood-red, glow
melting day-and-night
fusing flame-and-memory...
Timeless. (Cal More)

Out of the Ashes... (One)

Embraced
by a global-group-hug
and circumnavigating smoke-clouds: reminders that compassion
and breath
have no borders...

Cradled
within the shelter and safety
of community:
hugs and hospitality of strangers
love, prayers and support
circling the world...

Now
making moments
for important:
friends and family
self and strangers
small acts of kindness
big hearts...

Grateful
for the previously
taken-for-granted:
breathable air
beautifully-blue sky
shoots of green deafening
echoes of ashes...

One.
(Cal More)

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