

Submission Number: NND.001.00876

Submission Of:

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?

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?

I cannot accept the amount of livestock losses that are constantly seen not only in the 2019/20 bushfires but also in other bushfires where grazing animals are involved such as sheep, cattle ect...

I accept sometimes there are only minutes warning to activate a fire plan due to localised lightning strikes for instance, then stock losses are inevitable.

Stock losses in many areas I visited in the Corryong area was due to poor planning by the farmers involved. In most cases I don't believe the farmers had the knowledge on how to prepare for grass fires to avoid stock losses. Cattle and sheep were left to fend for themselves as farmers were concentrating on putting the fire out, protecting infrastructure or just getting out to simply save their lives.

I have spoken to many farmers regarding their livestock fire plan and can honestly say I have not had one plan that I would call acceptable. In most cases they have no plan at all and don't have the knowledge on how to construct a plan that will save not only their animals but there future income from those animals. In some cases years of valuable breeding genetics have been lost.

Having tried to source information from various organisations such as Meat and Livestock Australia, Wool Innovations, Fire Organisations etc.. I cannot find a fire plan that I would feel comfortable with. They have good publications on livestock recovery after a fire but fall short on detailed prevention.

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

Planning for livestock prevention starts many months before the fire season and sometimes years. To have a good livestock fire prevention plan you have to image the type of day that brings such events. Temperatures usually above 35c, low humidity allowing for spot fires and unbearable strong winds. Livestock on such a day are reluctant to travel so any plans must incorporate this issue.

I had to execute my fire plan on two occasions when I was farming. Luckily on both occasions a wind change prevented the fire from entering my property. I had a small holding paddock, well constructed to hold about 2000 sheep. It was centrally located, with water and some shade. The paddock had been sprayed out in the spring so all that was left was bare dirt. I sprayed 3 meters on the outside of the fence so the fire would not burn the posts. Having a plantation forestry background I knew exactly what chemicals were required.

If I were building such a paddock today it would be all steel, with wider gateways and divided into 4 sections so I didn't have to draught the separate mobs after the fire had passed.

On both occasions knowing the day was going to be high risk fire I put the sheep into the holding paddock early to mid morning so it was one less worry I had to have. I could then concentrate on asset protection and dealing with spot fires. With water and plenty of room I knew the stock were safe from any fire.

To construct such a holding paddock involves strategic planning. Some farms would need several, others one centrally located may suffice. Water is essential so the stock can stay there for extended periods.

If I was constructing a paddock for fire prevention today it would be totally different from what I made do with in the past. I think some research needs to go into to this vital component of a livestock fire plan and farm management.

Then the most important part of it all is rolling it out to farmers. Guidelines papers can be printed only to be lost in the archives. Using local CFA, RFS, CFS and TFS who are often made up of farmers would be a good start to getting the livestock fire plan into the heartland.

Grass fires and stock losses are more likely to happen when there has been a reasonable to good spring. Once grasses have cured then these are the conditions suited to grass fires.

I spent time around Buchan and Gelantipy in East Gippsland after the fires, the farmers were in a drought and had very little grass for the fire to run through and stock losses were minimal.

We have failed to learn from past mistakes with stock loses and to do nothing is a recipe for failure again and again.

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

I would like to apologise for how rushed I am with this submission as I was unaware of the Royal Commission starting.

I propose a small task force to investigate a plan to come up with the best livestock fire plan.

The task force would need to engage many expertise in a variety of industries, for instance water storage and pump experts, chemical companies, fencing solutions, veterinarians etc...

Farmers would adapt the plan to suit their own circumstances but need the perfect model for a starting point.

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