

Submission Number: NND.001.00903

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 personal situation

What was your personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires?

Where do you live? Eurobodalla (A)

Your Submission

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

1. Getting tourists out of the area on 1st, 2nd Jan, just about all gone by 3rd Jan.
2. My local Central Tilba RFS brigade - doing morning meetings to keep everyone informed. At times it was the only information I was able to access. Please note: I live on hectares in Central Tilba, not on your list of towns & totally different geography to either Wallaga Lake or Narooma, which are the closest towns
3. My RFS brigade doing extraordinary measures to make sure Tilba Tilba had sufficient water & water pressure
4. Bega Regional ABC for continuing emergency information
5. Mayor of Bega Valley Shire Council - Kristy McBain, kept information flowing on a daily basis
6. Andrew Constance, State MP, who via media kept govt agencies & not for profits informed of what was required immediately....didn't necessarily happen, but was a great voice for getting heard, where others would not be heard.
7. People of local communities organizing relief centres.
8. Local people stepping up to help in amazing ways....helping those who needed help with filling in forms for bushfire grants; mental health measures: practical help where needed; transport of goods from Canberra or any other city; local groups supplying cooked meals
9. Emergency World Kitchen
10. My local community doing working blitzes to make properties bushfire ready...
11. All our local RFS brigades & the local volunteer RFS firefighters & later on brigades from elsewhere coming to help.
12. Seeing defence people & extra police out and about in our area, it felt like help was arriving & we weren't doing it on our own.
13. Information meetings in November and December conducted by RFS on bushfire preparations, what to expect, what to do, planning & clean up of your property were excellent.
14. RFS mitigation Officer who inspected & offered advice on my property in October.
15. Shane Fitzsimon and Gladys Berejklean
16. On days when people had to evacuate, people went to the towns designated, so any firefighting required could protect those towns....this mostly worked well.
17. Marty Webster, Bega RFS command, media officer. He gave valuable up to date information.
18. Blaze Aid and Team Rubicon

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

1. Communications
 - a) the Fires Near Me website: didn't give enough information & much of it was too general. i.e I checked the website at 10pm on the 30th December to check the Coutengenyay Fire, to the far west of me, it was one I was concerned about because if it moved east it would link up with other fires....it still seemed to be under control and not large, by 4am it was in my area.....did it travel all that way in 6 hours or was the map wrong?
 - b) ABC Bega Regional -one of their towers was fire damaged so on certain days I was not able to hear their broadcast but could get ABC Regional Illawarra - unfortunately Illawarra only gave emergency fire info south to Batemans Bay.....and with no power, there was no way of contacting anyone to let them know that our areas was without fire information.
 - c) landlines....exchanges don't work after power outages of 1-2 days....so landlines were not an alternate source of communication.
 - d) Mobile towers, same energy problem. Apparently it was theoretically possible to call 000, but not in my area for a number of days.
2. Eurobodalla Shire Council went missing. Info specific to Eurobodalla very scant compared to Bega Valley Shire. The ESC employees worked extremely hard during these times, but the elected officials took a long time to get into action.
3. On the 12 January announcing tourists should return to our area seemed totally to ignore the devastation and shock most people were going through due to the fires. It had only been 12 days prior that tourists were told to go home. Many local people were homeless, had lost livestock, people were in shock, and the area was trying to help where it could. The fires were still active, roads kept opening and closing and power was still not available in certain areas. Thankfully most tourists did not return and those who did were again isolated when fire threatened and roads in and out of the area were closed over the days of 22-25 January.
4. Jan 4-5 only access into BVS& ESC area was via Brown Mountain. In that time, Bega had supplies of fuel and supermarket goods. Narooma and Moruya did not, and these 2 towns were classed as evacuation centres and had inadequate supplies.
5. Where to register to avail of grants etc could sometimes be difficult.
6. Where to register for donated fodder wasn't easy.

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national

natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

1. Hazard Reduction by fire.

HR needs to really be evaluated. Where winter HR has been conducted has it stopped a fire? Is there public information available on HR and results.

In October 2018 the Yankee Gap Fire burnt 100,000 hectares, 15 months later it burnt again. If the Yankee Gap fire didn't stop the recent fires what will?

HR has to be smarter and seems to me should be closer to assets.

I don't think any HR would have stopped these summer fires.

2. Electricity: without power back up in some way, then phone communications fail.

3. Towers: both mobile phone and radio need to be made more fool proof if possible.

4. More help with landholders, who request or need it, in preparing their properties for bush fire season. Free to those on low income, priced reasonably for others.

5. Fires Near Me (NSW) better information.

6. I found the Victorian Fires Near Me equivalent, was difficult to navigate and the info was too too general. I was checking their state for the fires south of Bega Valley, just as concerning as the fires to the north of me.

7. Increased funding for the RFS.

8. Defence could have been called in earlier.

9. Training of a section of Defence to know how to fight fires, to be called upon when required to relieve fire crews.

10 Training a section of Defence for central RFS communication

11. This area is going to take years to recover hopefully the impetus to get it done stays the distance and the area is not forgotten.

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

All in all things worked, if somewhat chaotically at the beginning.

Tourists left.

Residents knew what they had to do and when to do it, if they didn't, they hadn't been paying attention for a few months.

Supplies finally started getting through.

Recovery centres started operating.

Help started getting to those who needed it.

The aftermath of the fires is a difficult path for many, and they should not be forgotten once the shock of fires has ceased from media coverage.

I doubt anyone could have been prepared for the 31st of Jan fires, but while homes, buildings, livestock were destroyed most people survived.

Sure we can do better, but I am so grateful for the all the workers and volunteers who worked for months on the bushfires in one capacity or another with one aim of trying to keep people safe.

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