

Submission Number: NND.001.00913

Submission Of: Chris OSullivan

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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?

Where do you live? Bega Valley (A)

Your Submission

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

RFS and BVSC community meetings to encourage people to evacuate.

Push to ensure all tourists left the far south coast.

Bvsc evacuation centres. Community volunteers in those centres.

Up to date posts that I put on Facebook to keep local people, especially those who evacuated, informed about what was really going on. This, also, was a great help to concerned relatives and friends out of the area. (As I'm not very "tech savvy" I am unable to upload them without I.T. assistance!)

Some of the preparation work the RFS did with the "possie tracker." These little fire breaks worked very well around my property. Also some of the work the RFS did creating fire breaks along fire trails. Both these operations seemed to have limited success in some places.

The local RFS brigades and many community members managed to "black out" the Myrtle Mountain fire in under a week.

This fire started in country that was as dry and vulnerable as anywhere else on the East coast on a catastrophic day. How and why this fire was managed needs to be forensically examined and lessons learnt from one of the few victories there was over the summer.

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

Communication was the biggest problem before, during and after the bushfires.

The radio and telecommunications systems that the Wyndham RFS had to rely on didn't work when it needed to. With so many Mobile phone black spots in our area the ability to communicate between fire units and Bega ops centre was hopeless.

The Firesnearme app and the Vic Emergency app both have many faults and need a major overhaul. Too often when information was really needed the firesnearme app was left lacking and actually melted down at crucial times.

The army response, whilst I've heard was useful elsewhere, was disappointing around here.

Diesel fuel was very find to come across and was lucky for Wyndham that a local log truck driver had fuelled up just before the Christmas break and we were able to syphon fuel from his truck otherwise the Wyndham, Rocky Hall and Burragate RFS units would have been without whilst fighting the Myrtle Mountain fire around New Year.

ABC Radio is supposed to be our lifeline. When the fires were hitting hard their seemed to be only one local presenter available. Often people from all over Australia (Mackay was the furthest I heard) with no local knowledge were trying to inform local people on what to do. This was problematic as most couldn't pronounce town or area names.

When we have fires at our own doorstep we don't need to get information about fires elsewhere in the state. We needed more up to date localised data and warnings. A lot of the ABC radio warnings were way behind the actual time things were happening.

Recovery help after the event was, and still is, way too hard for people affected by fires to be able to deal with. It's fractured, confusing and frustrating. It has caused more mental health issues than the bushfires.

This submission not having a drop down for Wyndham, Rocky Hall, Towamba and many other places is a fault. I've had to put Candelo as my town as it was the closest option and Candelo is a half hours drive away!

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

More work needs to be done on maintaining fire trails so they can be used when bushfires break out. There are still many fire trails and bush tracks in this area that are impassable due to the bushfires and also the 250mm flood we had straight after.

Satellite technology needs to be investigated for emergency services. GPS trackers on all vehicles. Satellite phones and radio technology maybe the answer? I have heard the heavy smoke would interfere but people around here still had satellite television even when the smoke turned the sky black during the day.

ABC radio needs to train local people to help with broadcasts during emergencies, people with local knowledge who can work with the RFS and

get important information out to the public quickly and efficiently.

Total revamp is needed with the emergency apps. This day and age it should be a lot stronger and concise with its information. A national app is needed as having to use two different apps from Vic and NSW was a major problem during the border fire

Mobile black spot areas need to be addressed as a priority. Especially as Telstra have been totally hopeless at fixing burnt and broken land lines. There are still home owners in this area that have not been reconnected.

Everyone keeps saying that the best recovery ideas and work have been done by local people and communities. This is true! I have spent countless hours organising relief, water, road building and clearing, advocating for others with insurance, government and charity organisations. We are getting things done on many fronts.

This work has been time consuming and mentally draining and my business and work has suffered. I believe every town or community that has been affected by any disaster needs to be able to have a local person from within the community to be paid for twelve months to co ordinate the mountains of work needed to help that community get back on its feet. I.E. in the Bega Valley we needed one from the Cobargo/Quamma area. One from Bemboka. One from the Wyndham/ Towamba/Rocky Hall areas and one from Wonboyn/Kiah.

Recovery centres need to have trained people. So that when someone who has been affected by a disaster can go there once, fill out ONE FORM only. This information is then processed by their trained case manager who sees the affected people through the whole process. The biggest problem through out this disaster has been trying to plough our way through the whole recovery process and it needs to be stream lined. Many folk around here are of the opinion that it was easier when we were dealing with the fires because at least then we knew who the enemy was!

Fuel, especially diesel storage needs to be addressed.

The armed forces need to be trained in bushfire fighting and recovery work. The biggest threat to Australia's sovereignty is not from a foreign invasion, but from nature itself.

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

I'm not sure how these things work. If possible I would like to be able to address the Royal Commission as I feel more comfortable to verbalise and expand my ideas rather than write them.

I would also like the opportunity to be able to show the social media posts that I did during and after the fires to show how good information can be spread.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

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