

Submission Number: NND.001.01033

Submission Of:

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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? Wingecarribee (A)

Your Submission

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

The response by the NSW Fire Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, all the local RFS units and personnel and the people of the area who were prepared to help others as best that they could. My Premier Gladys Berejiklian acted strongly and with a good sense of purpose. The same for Victoria who was very well looked after by Premier Daniel Andrews there. I was constantly on the ABC Emergency News broadcast from the Illawarra listening to road openings and closings and co-ordinating that with the Fires map of where ember attacks were occurring. I had several friends who were evacuated and were in their car close to a beach in the Bega area and not sure whether to move or not. These friends had limited mobile coverage /petrol as they were living in their car for several days and could only txt and I relayed safety information to them.

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

The Federal Government acted in an absolutely shameful manner. The most apparent thing was the SCALE of the fires that Scott Morrison MP failed to grasp. It was a national emergency from the beginning, as Fire Chiefs had been prepared to tell him. Enough advice about that Minister Bill Shorten had a fire plan for the summer of 2020-2021. The elected Government did not and failed to listen when RFS chiefs and ex-chiefs (who must be respected like ex-PMs) asked for large-scale aerial back up, they were ignored. This was the most devastating aspect of the failure of the Federal Government to deal with the 2019-2020 Bushfires Fires.

I saw many people that kept sending messages on Twitter "Get the aerial water bombers sitting in California now. There was a US-Australian-NZ" written 19-year old agreement to share such facilities. A person Jon Dee (www.JohnDee.com), an Australian of the Year (NSW 2010) who was interviewed on ABC TV who had written to the US Agency where these large aircraft were sitting on the terminal with crew ready to come and help Australia. There was nothing stopping them. Except one phone call. Apparently a State Premier can ask for such support but the Australian PM has to actually make the phone call to the US President. I watched on Twitter that night as first Trump tweeted "Just had a lovely phone call with Scott Morrison" and then a little later, "No, we do not have aircraft ready to help Australia and I cannot authorise that". I suggest it felt like my country was being run by someone not acting in my country's best interests. We had small aircraft-water bombers sure. But none of the very large-scale aerial bombers like the six California ones who had put out the California Wild Fires and the Brazillian Wild Fires.

The single plume of smoke from Gaspers Mt in the Blue Mountains was in rugged terrain and not easily accessible by fire trails. The RFS watched this single plume for a week. It could have easily be dispersed enough by the large California water-tankers to enable RFS and equipment to manage a smaller fire. When the mega-blaze erupted a week later, that destroyed so much of our fauna and millions of years old flora, it was game over. This happened in many other fires. I was so very ashamed to be Australian. To live in a country that cares so little for the environment.

The Prime Minister did not support the State Premiers and Ministers in a manner that I have seen past Prime Ministers do and so I was constantly surprised, eg when he went to Hawaii and was slow to return saying "I can't hold a hose". He appeared to be bullying people in a shameful manner on his return. He also made me very embarrassed in his response to the young pregnant woman in Cobargo who asked for help from him for the RFS. She had been burnt out and had nothing. He just walked away to his fleet of cars that brought no food or care to this devastated town. The Prime Minister kept saying "It's a state issue". I saw that as a cop-out. In my 76 years, I have seen bushfires, floods and other calamities like Darwin in 1973. I have never heard a Prime Minister say it is not my concern, as this is a State issue. In a national emergency, the Prime Minister is the person the country looks to for leadership. There was none. NO leadership. I felt so ashamed and devastated that the NLP Government could not act to support all the States and Premiers in a co-ordinated manner. The summer of 2020-2021 will be another devastating hot and dry summer. What is the Federal Government doing about it?

I also live near where the deaths of two RFS members occurred. I ask how did this happen that NSW RFS trucks are not fitted with roll-bars like the CFA trucks are in Victoria? This needs to be rapidly changed so that no more deaths occur in 2020-2021.

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

We need a new Federal Government as, without this, nothing will change. We need to have people prepared to listen to REAL scientists, not anyone who is prepared to agree with them. I am also horrified to see these burnt forests now being logged. I know there are fine scientists at the University of Canberra, CSIRO, and many other of our fine institutions. Why have they been ignored and in many cases, de-funded?

I hope the lack of support by the Prime Minister and his Ministers during these massive fires was not because they saw the devastation as a chance to see the burnt trees as a profit logging industry as the absence of wildlife, or most of them which were were dead by the billion meant the environmental protests would be less. I know Professor David Lindenmayer would have been a great advocate for an absence of logging fragile burnt eco-systems.

The \$2 billion grant offered by the Prime Minister needs to materialize. It was never "notional" which was the word used to account for it not being in the budget. We need you to sort this mess out.

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

Please be strong and firm and call out the failures. Map out future roles of the various Federal and State Governments and Ministers. Australians are full of despair and this RC is the only way our voices can be heard. In this appalling situation, there seemed to be an advantage to being part of a Federation as the State Premiers, in general, acted with the sense of purpose and strong action to protect our bushland. But if a State Premier wants the mega-large air tankers in, to prevent a mega-blaze, and this cannot happen without the Prime Minister making one phone call, this is a recipe for disaster as occurred in the Gosper's, Balmoral and the Cobargo and other fires.

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