

Submission Number: NND.001.01047

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? My family and I were staying with my parents in their home in Manyana when the fires came through on New Year's Eve

Where do you live? Coburg North Melbourne

Your Submission

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

The incredible dedication and effort of the Rural Fire Service volunteers, plus a professional fire and safety officer holidaying at Manyana where we were staying with my parents took on a lead role of communicating with the community and developing a plan of response. Two women set up the local community hall as a place to go to, to find out what was happening, house those displaced until they could be billeted out to others, be a place where food and other essential items could be dropped off and collected. The work of all these people that were volunteering was incredible and humbling. The fires came through on Tuesday, New Year's Eve and we left Manyana on the afternoon of Friday 3rd of January. My parents stayed at their property and were very impressed with the efforts of helicopters, aeroplanes and fire fighters fighting the fires when they came back through to threaten Manyana on Saturday 4th of January. They thought the coordinated response of all these groups to protect their community was so significant and impactful. I also thought that the first warnings that came through on our phones was excellent. Once power was out and phones lost their charge and had no coverage then communication via phones becomes very limited, so good for the very start of a fire, but not so good for prolonged fires.

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

Knowing now, what we experienced I think that basic training for all property owners in fire risk areas is really important, this training hadn't happened as far as I, or my parents were aware before. This training needs to include a clear direction of what to do, where to go if you are evacuating and if you are staying to protect your property how best you can do this to ensure that you are not putting your life or others at risk.

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 are experiencing, like the rest of the world, hotter temperatures, more extreme temperatures and weather conditions as a result of the impacts of human induced climate change. I strongly believe that first and foremost, we need to do something to address this climate change, ie to reduce our CO2 equivalent emissions going into the atmosphere right now and at a massive level to help us reduce the risk of these events, like we saw last summer happening again and again and getting worse and worse and more extreme. If we don't do this, we are merely stocking a fire with one hand and pouring water on it with the other. Reducing our CO2 emissions is the most important step.

Second to this, we need to accept that even with doing a great deal right now about human induced climate change we are most likely to keep experiencing more devastating fires, extreme weather events and temperatures for some time, as we have not yet felt the full effect of the CO2 already in our atmosphere. I think we need to be really clear about where are our areas of greatest risk, map these and maybe that means we can no longer live in some places, the risk is too high. We then need to build our community knowledge around this risk, what to do to be in the best place to protect lives, property, our beautiful forests, our beautiful coast lines and the things we love the most about people, communities and nature. Develop basic understanding and skills around how to prepare your property for fire and keep it prepared. Be clear about where to go when you evacuate. Build up our resources to fight fires, including our volunteer base, understand what volunteers need to want to get involved and try and provide this, make sure they have the equipment and training to as safely as possible do the job we are asking them to do. I also believe that we should pay people to undertake this work, not just rely on volunteers, and at very least recompense them for the days they give up to fight fires, which would otherwise have been days they could have been working to earn a living. I think how we approach the rebuilding is really important. Power goes out when a fire comes through, the safe havens, community centres, gathering places should have their own solar/battery power supplies, and fridges and freezers, so that they can still keep the lights on, medications cold and freeze ice blocks that people can borrow to take home and keep basic supplies cold in fridges and eskies. So, when we rebuild, let's make sure we build in this resilience. Also, for many small hamlets and communities find out what the cost of reestablishing power lines is, versus, setting up the whole community on a stand alone solar/battery power system? If the latter is not that much more, lets go for the latter, so that we are better prepared for the next fire, able to recover faster and doing something to address the fundamental increased cause and risk of such hazardous and extreme fires, ie climate change. Also, in our rebuilding, let's mandate smart design, designing properties not only for secure on-site electricity generation but up to the standards required in fire prone areas and beyond these standards. Let's also make sure that water tanks are mandated in rebuilds and where possibly greywater is diverted to gardens as these will both help keep garden areas greener (a small buffer against fires) and also help increase the likelihood that people will have access to water to fight fires, even if mains water supplies fail or the pressure drops dramatically. Let's rebuild sustainably, to help address climate change, build in more resilience for families, households and create a property less at risk of being destroyed and with it potentially people's lives.

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

Addressing global warming is a fundamental action we need to take in order to help reduce the risk of the fires we saw happening again and again and getting more and more severe. Rebuilding sustainably with renewable energy options, on-site water capture and reuse, smart building design and product use is really important. Let's build back better, with more resilience, more sustainability, in a way that reduces ongoing running costs and the likelihood of future replacement costs. Let's continue to bring our community together to work together, by growing our volunteer base, growing our skill and understanding of what to do, all of us, how and when, in really practical ways. Let's continue

to love, look after, grow and appreciate our forests and natural systems, learn from indigenous people on how best to manage them and learn when and where to stay out of them in terms of permanent structures and the risk of fires.

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