

Submission Number: NND.001.01053

Submission Of: Margaret Blakers

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?

I take 'emergency response' to mean the period immediately around the bushfire itself. I have no expertise in this.

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

I take 'emergency response' to mean the period immediately around the bushfire itself. I have no expertise in this.

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

My main knowledge relates to land management and biodiversity, especially the impacts of logging in native forests. The key points I would like to make are:

Regional Forest Agreements

Biodiverse native forests become more resilient and fire-resistant as they age.

Native forest logging contributes significantly to global heating by reducing forest age and the amount of carbon stored in native forests. It also makes forests more fire-prone.

The Commonwealth's decision to extend Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), making them effectively perpetual, gives the relevant states (NSW, Vic, Tas, WA) control over logging in 6 million ha of native forests.

The 2019-20 bushfires are an ecological catastrophe. They make RFAs untenable as policy or in practice.

RFAs cannot be fixed within the RFA framework because the agreements are predicated on gradual change not catastrophic events. They contain no mechanism for comprehensively altering the terms of the agreement to reset the balance between conservation and production made necessary by the fires.

RFAs should be abolished and native forest logging ended.

More information: <https://www.envirojustice.org.au/no-longer-tenable-bushfires-and-regional-forest-agreements/>

Commonwealth responsibility

The Commonwealth had no established plan for responding to fires of such magnitude either immediately or as short or long term recovery measures. Processes under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act are too slow and cumbersome.

The work of the Expert Panel on wildlife and threatened species bushfire recovery is excellent but is being ignored. On the NSW south coast where about 80% of state forests available for logging were burnt, the Forestry Corporation (FCNSW) with approval from the EPA has resumed logging on the flimsiest of pretexts. The approvals in 15 compartments so far (3158 ha) have been given without reference to impacts on priority species in need of urgent management intervention identified by the Expert Panel.

Neither the NSW government nor the Commonwealth has intervened to halt logging, suspend RFAs, or implement the Expert Panel's recommendations.

Responsibility to protect Australia's biodiversity must lie with the Commonwealth including clear legal and financial responsibility for avoiding extinction caused by fire prevention and management activities and for post-fire recovery.

Funding and resources

In early January the Commonwealth government announced \$50 million for wildlife rescue and recovery, a 'down payment' with a promise of more to come. No more has come.

Funding for biodiversity management is woefully inadequate and even more so in the face of increasingly dangerous and destructive bushfires driven by global heating.

Commonwealth funding for biodiversity, including research and management to improve resilience, should be massively increased.

Fuel management

The use of broad-scale mechanical fuel reduction and salvage logging as means of reducing fuel loads and fire risk is not supported by evidence and should be rejected.

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

Global heating

If global heating is not curtailed, Australia and Australians face a bleak future.

We are well-placed to act. Australia has the best renewable resources and can rapidly replace fossil fuels. Australia has the land, biodiversity and forests to implement 'natural climate solutions' (<https://theconversation.com/want-to-beat-climate-change-protect-our-natural-forests-121491>).

The most important recommendation the Royal Commission can make is for Australia to tackle global heating with urgency, determination, imagination and creativity.

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