

**Submission Number: NND.001.01066**

**Submission Of: Mica Lynnah**

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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?

We were very lucky to have our Mayor, Kristy McBain and Ian Campbell giving frequent updates and advice. Having local leaders and media personalities covering the crisis where we live gave us voices to trust.

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

1. The app was not frequently updated. On December 31st we enacted our fire plans, and watched as the sky turned red, and we had no idea what was going on. My house is in Bega, and became a safehaven for evacuees from directly impacted areas.
2. As conditions eased for a moment before the "as bad as it gets" weather forecast the following Saturday, there were mixed messages about what to do. The advice was that if you didn't need to be in the area, you should leave. There was only one road out, and it was threatened by fire in two places. After much consultation and big emotions I took my children late one night while the road was open, and headed to Canberra, where the smoke was thick and toxic to breathe.
3. The evacuation centre in Bega is an old brick building without air conditioning. It's positioned between the pool, which was reassuring, but next to the gas depot, which was terrifying. When the threat is as great as it was on that Saturday, January 4th, I think having a principle evacuation centre in such close proximity to the gas depot is alarming.
4. There was talk about the evacuation centre having "standing room only". If my fire plan is to evacuate with my children while my partner stays to defend, I need to know that there would be a space for myself and my children. Eventually on the day other sites were opened, but again, one of the sites is a sport and rec building which is essentially an un-insulated tin shed. It doesn't inspire confidence. It would have been better to have information about those sites in the lead up to the event.
5. Local towns, like Cobargo, did not have sufficient fire fighting resources.

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. The scale of the fires in the 2019/20 season was absolutely unprecedented and a result of climate change. This enquiry should address the source and causes of climate change. That is, the mining and burning of fossil fuels. Australia was recently ranked worst on climate policy out of 57 countries. We do not need the international community to say that we deserved this fire season. Rather, Australia needs to fast-track investment in green energy.
2. Funding for firefighting has fallen in recent years. This needs to be addressed.
3. The funding model for volunteer firefighting needs to be reviewed.
4. There needs to be more support for recovery, which can take a very long time. All levels of government need to cooperate on this, with a focus and support for local governments, who are in touch with the community and their needs.

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

1. As a Bega Valley resident, we witnessed 3 significant fires in less than 2 years. The first was the Tathra fire in March 2018. I am a 4th generation Bega Valley resident, and no one in my family remembers seeing a fire like that, especially in March. The next one, the Yankees Gap fire, started in August 2018, and burned for over 2 months. We all suffered anxiety from the smoke, the sound of the helicopters, and my children had trouble breathing. Then came 2019/20. The smoke blew in in late November, but the flames didn't reach the Bega Valley until December 30. These fires were absolutely terrifying.
2. Anyone who drove up the east coast from mid 2019 would have seen the large scale of die-back in the forests. We knew this season was coming. The cause of the die-back should be investigated.
3. Two of the places that were particularly impacted were the area south of Eden, which has been heavily logged, and around Mogo, which has

also been heavily logged. My sense is that the soil became more exposed, leading to drier conditions which then meant that the trees were in die-back/survival mode - presenting dead foliage and dropping branches. I think we need an enquiry into the impact of logging on forests and it's relationship to bushfire.

4. I'd also like to add that the area south of Eden had hazard reduction burns conducted throughout the off season. I frequently noted them on the Firesnearme app in 2019, which I check frequently since the Tathra fire.

5. The only way to truly address this crisis is at its cause. We need to take action on climate change now. And fast.

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