

Submission Number: NND.001.01095

Submission Of:

Your Details

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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? Tomakin

Your Submission

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

Instructions were clear and concise. Authorities were helpful and were patient with inquiries with impatient and scared individuals. The response seemed as if the NSWRFs were well trained to handle with an active bushfire. The NSWRFs delivered necessary information promptly, accurately, and in a manner that was accessible and understandable. The NSWRFs volunteers conducted their efforts in a seemingly professional and coherent manner, which helped alleviate the stress of impending devastation and destruction.

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

I received an evacuation order early in the morning on December 31st 2019 via text message. If I did not have my cellphone off of silent, I would have missed it and been placed in immediate danger. I was not informed the night before (30th), like other patrons in the holiday park I was residing in at the time, the possibility of having to evacuate the next day (31st). It was only after the fact and after I had been evacuated that the police were door-knocking the night before, bringing with them the evacuation warning. Why was my residence not alerted like the rest of the caravans in the park at the time? What was the rationale there, or was it just human error?

The South Coast lost all phone, internet, and electricity connections. The severe lack of information compounded the stress of not knowing whether myself or my family were going to be safe, or having to be continually ready to evacuate. The lack of sturdy infrastructure necessary to maintain Australia's modern lifestyle was really exposed during these fires. There was also no where to go if the fires did reach us. I understand that authorities cannot help that the country runs out of land on the coast, however, there were examples all up the coasts from NSW through to VIC where locals and holiday makers were stranded at sea. The firefighters seemed unable to deal with the rapid advancement of the fire, due to the lack of new equipment, more personnel, and vehicles to create relatively safe evacuation points.

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

The Federal Government really need to wake up to the incontestable fact that anthropogenic climate change is exacerbating the severity of natural disasters, such as bushfires. Yes, bushfires have occurred in Australia for millennia, however, the continued degradation of the environment and continued warming of the global average temperatures is a root cause of the fires.

The best mitigation strategies must include the simple recognition that the Governments' current stance on the continued use and tax-payer subsidises of fossil fuels is harmful for the country. There needs to be a swift transition to more environmentally friendly, appropriate, and efficient sources of energy and transportation. The reason, as confirmed by ecologists, climate scientists, and geologists, and hundreds of items of literature related to anthropogenic climate change, all point to the degradation of the environment as worsening natural disasters.

The group of 25 current and former fire chiefs were saying as early as March 2019 that if more resources were not allocated to firefighting services, then the events of the summer would become unavoidable. It is saddening to know that if the Prime Minister were to listen to these experts in fire mitigation, management, and fighting, then whilst we could not have fully prevented the fires, we could have least mitigated the effects of close to 20 million hectares and over one billion native animals incinerated.

The fact that the Prime Minister consistently shifted the blame, stating that the fires was a state issue, is just poor form. The Prime Minister was a hindrance to efforts to control the fires, provided no effective policy before and during the crisis in attempt to mitigate the impending, and predicted, fires. Honestly, how he justified a trip to Hawaii in the middle of the worst bushfire event in modern Australian history, the fact that he attempted to silence the media reports on the fact that he left the country during the crisis, and the piss poor excuse that it was preplanned, hurts me and many other Australians. His poor perception of reality was clearly on display, continually arguing the crisis was under control when it was painfully apparent it was not.

The NSW government cut \$80 million from funding for the NSWRFs. Why? What justifications exist, especially when experts in the fields of climate science and fire fighting, warned that the droughts are more severe, last longer, and are providing a smaller window of opportunity for traditional mitigation efforts such as back burning? The lack of funding resulted in the lack of appropriate equipment for volunteers and paid workers, firefighting vehicles, and resources to combat blazes in the state. It has resulted in large swathes of economic collapses for small communities and businesses hardest hit by the fires, a destruction of livelihoods, professions, and loss of Australian lives. I felt bad when I witnessed volunteers struggling to keep up with the blazes, underprepared, undermanned, and underfunded. They clearly were in need of more, yet the NSW budget dictated that their sacrifices and efforts were worth an \$80 cut to essential funding.

There needs to be greatly reinforced and protected infrastructure to rural areas. Bushfires will happen again to this magnitude, and if state and local governments continue to ignore the need to upgrade and maintain, as much as feasible, disaster resistant technologies that allow for electricity, phone, water, gas, and internet connections, then there will be more masses of people trapped for weeks without stable shelter. I

was fortunate enough to evacuate to a place with running water and a backup generator, but I witnessed thousands of helpless Australians stranded in evacuation centres along the South Coast. Minimal access to basic supplies added to severity of the situation.

In summary, Federal and State governments must listen to the experts warning them about these events. Australia is woefully underprepared to deal with natural disasters, which are predicted, accompanied by verifiable, quantifiable, compelling data and evidence, are going to worsen. If authorities continue to cut funding to essential emergency services, environmental protection agencies, undermine environmental legislation that is detrimental to Australians, and continue to force a twisted brand of neoliberalism, the country will suffer.

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

I agree with Nelligen NSWRFs volunteer Paul Parker. Tell the Prime Minister to go and get [REDACTED]

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