

Submission Number: NND.001.01127

Submission Of: Cathy Griff

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? Bega Valley Shire Councillor

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? Bega Valley Greens

Your Submission

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

Communications were frequent and accurate from Council, ABC radio, Rural Fire Service, and relevant phone apps;
Cooperation and support among neighbourhoods reduced fear and isolation;
Evacuation centres set up with speed and efficiency of operation;
Lessons from Tathra fires in 2018 were applied and could be transferred;
Regular workshops and local messaging about asset protection and how to best prepare residences.

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

Communities isolated without power, internet or telecommunications for long periods;
RFS were overstretched and lacked sufficient resources and numbers, despite doing brilliant job;
Coordination between the many emergency players became complex;
Australian Defence Force came in too late and were not authorised to make use of their heavy plant;
Visiting politicians made promises to interest groups, not in best interests of majority and then often not followed up.

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

Actionable research: The Climate Council deserves government recognition and resourcing. It compiles valuable research and action plans relating to bushfires and climate change. Its Cities Power Partnership reflects the successes of local government in confronting climate change. Ongoing funding beyond June 2021 is essential for the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre.

RFS resourcing: An expanded paid firefighting RFS along lines of Fire and Rescue. ADF needs fire trained units to assist at outset.

Safe refuge central point for communities (say towns of over 2000 population) with off-grid power capacity.

Appropriate care of landscape - national parks, forests, crown lands: savage staff reductions have left National Parks, Fire and Rescue and RFS ill equipped to monitor and care for our natural environment, which should be the responsibility of lead environmental agencies. No amount of hazard reduction would have slowed some of the recent fires. Regardless of ground fuel, intense heat combusted and sped along crowns of eucalyptus trees. Areas re-burned that had been burned the previous year. Radical increase of fuel management could be ineffective and may be counterproductive by drying out and stressing vegetation.

Indigenous cultural burning practices have proven successful in our far south coast region. Victor Steffensen's book published February 2020, "Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia" is an in-depth account of Indigenous land practices. Local Indigenous practitioner, Daniel Morgan, is confident of cultural burning as a powerful tool in bushfire management. At the same time, he is realistic about the likely time frame for roll out of a comprehensive program. He speaks of the need to build a foundation, entailing trained individuals working continuously country wide. To date there have been sporadic projects which gather and train a team for a specific area but obliged to disband when the limited funding fades. The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation is aiming for a national approach to cultural burning and needs funds to do so. Indigenous burning practices definitely merit long term research and funding.

End native forest logging: logging operations create high fuel loads and dense regrowth vegetation, and reduces carbon sequestration by mature forests and native vegetation, which in turn exacerbates climate change. There needs to be a moratorium on logging after major bushfires, given the destruction of habitat for wildlife and plants. Logging workers will need help in transitioning to the plantation jobs or to other sustainable industries.

Submit to the current Biodiversity and Conservation Act Review: The Act is undergoing its once in a decade review and would benefit from input by the Royal Commission given the remit to protect native fauna and flora. Ecological recovery from natural disasters deserves urgent attention, especially given our species extinction record and crisis.

Establish a Bushfire and Climate Resilience Commission: Such a body could be along the lines of the NZ Earthquake Commission, funded by small insurance premium levy - to provide basic bushfire insurance coverage for residential property and farms. This Resilience Commission could fund could assist rebuilding of more fire resistant property. Evidence from earlier fires in our shire suggested building design and materials is a better determinant of asset endurance than distance to vegetation.

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

CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION is essential to addressing future natural disasters: Australia is uniquely dysfunctional among developed countries in

lack of national, urgent, robust climate change policies. The Commission would be well versed in the science and has a unique opportunity to call for such climate policy. Phrasing used in the terms of reference like 'changing climactic conditions' are insufficient in regard to the climate emergency, which should be declared by Australia. Scientific evidence shows anthropogenic global warming is causing hotter and drier weather conditions in many parts of the world, including South-East Australia (Climate Council Report November 2019, and references therein). The increasing frequency and severity of heatwave events – often accompanied by strong winds – is a major factor driving increased risk of catastrophic bushfires seen across large parts of Australia in the summer of 2019/20.

While shorter term factors other than anthropogenic climate change (eg Indian Ocean Dipole regional weather cycles; fuel loads; lightning strike ignition) play a role in determining when, where and how bushfires start, there can be little doubt that the longer term warming and drying of our climate is increasing the frequency and duration of severe, extreme and catastrophic fire conditions. This trend is also leading to increasingly unpredictable and uncontrollable fire behavior when bushfires do occur.

A recent international scientific study of the relationship between Australian bushfire risk and anthropogenic climate change (van Oldenborgh et al 2020, Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences journal) has found that the extreme fire weather conditions of the 2019/20 Australian summer were at least 30% more likely to occur under today's climate conditions than under the climate conditions existing in the early 1900s. The authors considered this was probably a substantial underestimate of the real increase in likelihood due to the inherently conservative nature of the models used. The study also concluded that if global warming continues and reaches 2 degrees, the occurrence of extreme fire weather conditions will be at least four times more likely than in the early 1900s.

The implications of this trend are clear. Australia must rapidly and deeply cut greenhouse gas emissions (including phasing out burning/export of fossil fuels), or else the frequency and severity of bushfires will continue to increase. Under this scenario, all attempts to enhance bushfire prevention, preparedness and response programs will ultimately be inadequate to prevent catastrophic bushfires becoming a regular feature in the Australian landscape. We have the solutions at our disposal to tackle climate change: we need to accelerate the transition to renewables and storage technologies, and non-polluting transport, infrastructure, and food production. Now we need federal government to show leadership to implement these changes.

[Do you agree to your submission being published?](#) Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name