

Submission Number: NND.001.01145

Submission Of: Terence Balle

Your Details

Email address:

Phone:

Preferred means of contact: Email

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? I was not evacuated but suffered financial loss due being casually employed and unwilling to work whilst my property was threatened.

Where do you live? Lismore (C)

Your Submission

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

ABC local radio was excellent. Facebook was also a very good means for disseminating local information. Public and community spirit was rallied

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

NSWRFS was under resourced.

Action plans with a decision matrix were not available. Therefore, prior to situations becoming catastrophic (at which point evacuation or fight was the only choice if it was still an option to evacuate) people did not know what the steps were that they needed to take or the different choices and actions they could take and had to make plans for themselves. Published simple dot points for actions and decision points could have given people more assurance that the actions they were taking were not futile and that the decision points would have gone some way to alleviating the uncertainty which of itself induced fear.

Community consultation by NSWRFS and NSW Parks and Wildlife (NSWPW) advised people of preparations they could make. There was also a degree of tokenism that simply gave people the opportunity to feel like they had been heard or consulted when in fact the meeting (I attended) made it very clear that we could not expect a fire truck at every property and some properties were indefensible. Of themselves these messages were not unreasonable given the circumstances of bushfire, however, people attending the meeting at the Dunoon Sports club were seeking proactive initiatives to minimise the existing threat in national parks adjacent to our properties and communities (The Mt Nardi bushfire). NSWPW did not want local community members entering the national parks, even when, these parks were on fire, adjacent to our properties and flames could be seen in those parks from vantages on our neighbouring properties. Community members took it upon themselves at their own risk and expense to cut fire trails in land adjacent to the national park. Coordination from NSWPW and NSWRFS could have better served us at this point and directed our efforts more efficiently. Furthermore, at the Dunoon Sports club meeting we were told by NSWPW that the fire was now quite small and that the loss of 'heritage value' in the national park caused by putting the fire out completely was greater than it was worth. How was that decision arrived at? How the decision was constructed needs to be transparent and held up for review, because in naming the 'loss of heritage value,' it is not clear whether the heritage value (of the national park threatened by the fire or the cost of it being extinguished in 'heritage value dollars') accounted in any way for the threat and cost to the properties adjacent to the national park. Who has the call to make that decision? With fires burning on national parks communities and landholders adjacent to the park need controlled access to the park with appropriate fire management strategies. Our community was motivated to assist and against the loss of heritage value we were told not to enter the park.

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

Effective climate change policy supported by peer reviewed science.

Better funded NSWRFS

More national resources dedicated to fire containment and management.

Better national leadership.

Improved water management policies.

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

Climate change due to human activity contributed significantly if not created, the circumstances conducive to the 2019 Bushfire disaster and climate change is a failure of government policy. The uncontrolled fires, the property loss, the loss of animal life in utter pain, horror and anguish, and the loss of human lives in unspeakable circumstances are a failure of the government to act upon the advice of its own departments. Whether this is mismanagement or criminal neglect by our governments may not be within the purview of the commission, but it is my sincere hope that any coroner's inquests direct the responsibility for this disaster back to the government.

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