

Submission Number: NND.001.01161

Submission Of: Christine Webb

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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? Tumut Community Association Incorporated

Your Submission

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

The response, fire-fighting efforts and selflessness of the brigades, individual firefighters and heavy machinery operators and each deserves a medal for their bravery.

Assistance provided by Fire Services, police and other emergency services from our local area, the region, NSW, ACT and other states.

The warning system and information provided through the Fires Near Me App, ABC radio, local radio station Sounds of the Mountains, the local newspaper and the community meetings provided the community with adequate time to prepare properties and make decisions about staying or leaving. The ACT public briefings provided additional relevant information for our area including details about the number of fire fighting personnel and appliances, the location and progress of the fire-fighting effort.

The staged evacuations and provision of transport for evacuations.

The property protection strategies and mammoth effort of the RFS and town fire brigades to limit damage in Batlow and other towns.

The effectiveness of the fire retardant delivered by the large fire-fighting planes.

The enormous and wonderful response from the local, regional and further distant communities in providing food and other provisions for the fire fighters and fire affected people.

The assistance provided by the armed force reserves for fire-fighting, land and property protection and recovery.

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

Pre-season planning, consultation and communication.

The Tumut Community Association Incorporated has had ongoing concerns about fire protection for Tumut and other towns with our council region and based on local knowledge about risk factors including weather, wind direction and drought members of our association predicted a major catastrophe emanating to the West of Tumut.

In response to community and our concerns and an article in the Weekend Advertiser noting Tumut's high rating for bush fire risk an invitation was extended to the community, Snowy Valleys Council, the Rural Fire Service, Forestry Corporation NSW and National Parks and Wildlife Service to attend a community meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to provide opportunity for the services to hear the community's concerns, to respond, provide information about planning and protection strategies and for discussion about improving hazard management. The RFS representative was not available due to a bushfire.

We were advised that there were plans for bushfire management and for safety of the community. Details of the plans and other information such as evacuation points were not provided. It became evident that there are several agencies responsible for various parcels of land and we understand the difficulties associated with this including budgetary constraints of each organisation. However in the case of wild dogs all agencies came together to solve the problem and this demonstrates that it is possible to work together on matters of serious public concern. Failure to implement strategies to reduce hazards and mitigate fire risks and protect Tumut.

No abatement areas/green zones around Tumut and trees and vegetation planted right to the town border and residential fences.

No preparation of towns with fire breaks, grass slashing and removal of vegetation prior to the bushfire season.

No clearing of rubbish and vegetation in the Tumut Town common and other areas close to houses and property.

There is free access to the common and other bush areas by irresponsible pedestrians and motorbike riders increasing the fire risk. Several fires occurred in the common and were caused by burning motor vehicles

The poor access for fire vehicles to the town common and in other bushland and the lack of action by governing bodies to maintain these areas.

Warning systems were inadequate for people who lost phone and radio contact placing them in a dangerous situation. Tumut lost radio and mobile phone contact at the height of the Dunn's Road fire when the wind was blowing embers and fire towards Tumut.

No contact phone number for the evacuation centres.

People offering accommodation to people evacuated and/or who lost homes could not list early their available accommodation.

No notification that evacuees had to attend the evacuation centre in Wagga to register.

Victoria's fire phone app provided more information than the NSW Fires Near Me App.

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

That the recommendations from the McLeod report on the Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires in the ACT, pages 225 to 232 be implemented in NSW including that local planning include green zones, fire abatement areas around residential areas for fire protection, that access to fire prone areas be maintained to allow for fire-fighting, that local knowledge be used in planning and consultation for fire preparation and that safe and resilient communication strategies be implemented for early warnings and ongoing emergency transmissions for the community and for the fire-fighting effort.

As a matter of urgency that there is funding made available for the Snowy Valleys Council to work with the other agencies to urgently reduce the fire hazards surrounding Tumut and to include in Local Environmental Plans and implement an immediate permanent fire abatement zone

surrounding Tumut by bulldozing or other means and permanent green zones to provide a buffer for the town from trees and vegetation.
That funding be made available for the agencies National Parks and Wildlife Services, Forestry Corporation NSW and Rural Fire Service for land management to remove hazards and mitigate risks and maintain this management plan.
That the NSW Rural Fire Service be provided with the power to consult on, advise and direct the above work.
That the Snowy Valleys Council work with other agencies to fully brief the Tumut Community about fire planning including designated fire safety zones prior to fire seasons.
That a warning system be implemented such as sirens for Tumut residents to alert them of the need to take action when other communication systems such as phone and radio fail.
That Snowy Valleys Council's future tree plantings include species which are fire resistant or reduce fire risk and residents are provided with advice similar appropriate species for their gardens.
That written and verbal communication about requirements for evacuation including the need to register be provided early during community meetings.
That the evacuation centres have dedicated phone lines
That people offering accommodation and provisions be provided with information about who they can contact early to register this assistance .
Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?
Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name