

Submission Number: NND.001.01213

Submission Of: Donna Maree Bell

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? Eurobodalla (A)

Your Submission

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

The FiresNearMe app worked well in being able to keep up to date with fire spread and likely impact.

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

The NSW Premier's and NSW RFS Commissioner's daily updates were not localised enough. While appreciated these were usually updates after the fact reports and there was not sufficient early information of what could be expected.

The reliance on accessing digitally provided information through app and websites would have proved difficult for those technically challenged or not have access to the digital information. That said the RFS was difficult to navigate and relevant information was not readily available without the need to navigate through the websites.

Obtaining information about recovery was also not easy and seemed a little uncoordinated between the state and federal governments.

The lack of foresight of the season by both the federal and state governments to make sure there was adequate planning, preparation and decision making to address the impending disaster. If governments had reacted to the fire predictions as they have done in response to COVID-19 there may have been a very different outcome.

Communications where mobile services and radio failed because of the fire.

The calls to the house phone and text messages were insufficient in providing the understanding necessary that we needed to evacuate. The stay or go advice should be clearer about what you need to be prepared to do to stay. The call to evacuate must be made much earlier with some purpose. If you don't leave there is follow up. How do you know if people stay or go?

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 response to the fires generally, during the disaster event on 31 December that affected the area and my home I was not sufficiently aware of how serious a situation was about to experience. I was probably information fatigued by then after witnessing fires (burn offs) around me. Where my home was located with the proper instruction from the local RFS about property protection and perhaps having an RFS on site my property would not have been affected. We luckily saved our home because we returned to the property and found everything but the house ablaze. I managed to get an RFS tanker to the property after driving back through the fire and tracking one down located in Nelligen. I am so grateful they agreed to my request.

There are so many things that need to change or improve to avoid and minimise the effects of similar bushfire and other natural disaster events but they are too many to mention. I was a volunteer with the ACT SES for 10 years and being on the affected side made me see things through a different lense. While I can deal with storm and flood events, fire is a whole different story.

I would like there to be a better understanding about whom has control over fire events. The one that started at Shallow Crossing in Eurobodalla in November 2019 was under the control of National Parks. It may only be rumour but I was advised there was a decision by National Parks to let the fire burn. That fateful decision, if true lead to the disaster that was to unfold. No doubt the Commission will investigate particular decisions and what resulted from the decisions there needs to be a more coordinated and collaborative decision making process between National Parks and the responsible state fire service.

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

I would if I had more time to complete my submission to mention my concerns with the recovery process, how affected people need to be better looked after whether they are insured or not. Its a minefield to work through everything after the event, just going through the event is enough but to be faced with needing to talk to insurance companies, utility companies. I observed very elderly people faced with the same things I was and while I could navigate my way around it must have been extremely, and continues to be, difficult for the elderly and others.

I am hoping that some real findings and strong recommendations for improvement come out of the Commission.

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

