

Submission Number: NND.001.01263

Submission Of:

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?
Where do you live? Nambucca (A)

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?
The volunteers, both RFS members and NON RFS members.
Having some dams to access for water.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?
I have been an active rural bush fire brigade member for over 40 years and attended many fires. I have seen back burns go wrong and create extra work and life threatening conditions for members. Just like the "Kian Road" fire and the "Bees Nest" fire, calling fires by such names did not give the general public sufficient understanding of the locality of the fires, nor was there any attempt to give warnings. I had never heard of Kian Road before despite living here for so long. I cannot find "Bees Nest" on a map. Employed personnel do not seem to have the capacity to take on board concerns and make any attempt to solve problems. One outcome should be that all possible scenarios for a fire should be communicated to the public. The advertising to be prepared with a fire plan does not encapsulate what happens how fast a fire can be upon your home. On the morning of 8th November, there was not hint that disaster was imminent. However, there should have been people who were conscious of the likelihood of a fire, changing directions. The severity of the drought in this area was never really acknowledged. Nor were the very dry conditions on the ground, combined with accumulation of bark, both on the ground and still on trees, ready to explode. There was never follow up from fire control to the brigades to do a follow up, both mentally and physically. There was no actual de-brief.

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

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

1.1 Causes and contributing factors
It is my understanding that there was a back burn at the corner of Jacob's Ladder and Horseshoe Road that went wrong and brigades were told to get out of the area. National Parks, brigades and Forestry were involved. This was weeks before the fire started coming down to the back of Taylors Arm. On 8th November when the brigades were at Butt's Creek Taylors Arm it is also my understanding that the Forestry told the brigades to get out as they had lost it. One hour later this fire had travelled from Butt's Creek to Utungun a distance of about 20kms by road, but direct line 10 kilometres. There was no warnings that the fire would change to an Easterly direction despite the fact this fire had been burning for weeks.

1.2 Preparation and planning
For this fire, there had been no preparation, no planning and no discussion with some of the brigades - although it had been burning for weeks. On the night of the fire, helicopters and water bombers appeared, warning people to vacate etc. These should have been deployed where the fire started, weeks before.

1.3 Response to bushfires
When the fire moved down, the fire was completely out of control. Spotting everywhere. It was complete mayhem. Due to communication overload and/or lack of understanding of the people in Kempsey, it was utter mayhem. Despite this the local brigades - along with non RFS members, did a sterling job and saved many places.

1.4 Any other matters
Having a combined centralised fire control centre of Kempsey and Nambucca, operating on the same communication channel, plus helicopters etc, plus numerous (at least 30 named brigades in two shires) brigades clogged communication at a time when it was most needed. The brigades were all trying to communicate but it became impossible

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