

**Submission Number: NND.001.01284**

**Submission Of: Margaret Mary Gaynor**

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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? Government integrity

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

### Your Submission

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

The standout efforts of local and state professional and voluntary firefighters in predicted but unprecedented extreme Black Summer (actually, Black Spring-&-Summer) conditions ameliorated what would otherwise have been a much greater loss of life and property. That is, tried and true State-based firefighting systems worked to their maximum, and beyond. These forces were fully supported by the wider community.

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

There were three areas of notable operational failure -- that is, DURING the emergency response:

1. Lack of clear leadership during a predicted, rapidly evolving, national bushfire crisis, of extraordinary spatial and temporal scale .
2. A resulting lack of cohesive coordination.
3. A lack of operational resources -- persons, equipment, finance. I note especially the deficiency in air support, properly reported to this government two years ago, and its failure to procure critical hardware before the accurately predicted catastrophic fire season materialised.

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 above failures can be summarised as top-level unpreparedness, which can be traced to systemic (ideological) rebuttal of credible scientific and professional firefighter expertise -- including predictions, warnings and advice -- over decades (see section below), to the point such denial can be termed negative hallucination. This calculated industry-lead approach also underlies and feeds substantial public confusion, leading to embittered divisive debate and organisational inertia.

These deficiencies can be represented as a chain or cascade of failures:

1. National Government denial and even rebuttal of fundamental expert information (climate science; fire fighting expertise).
2. Top level failure to accept/acknowledge climate-driven whole/part-of-continent (also global) environmental changes.
3. Failure to accept related accurate expert predictions (scientific; emergency service).
4. Failure to model not unlikely scenarios.
5. Failure to identify (and certainly to acknowledge) pointers to becoming-likely scenarios.
6. Failure to organise preventative whole of government response accordingly.
7. Failure to plan, coordinate and execute effective (integrated multi-level) disaster responses, thus relying on 'business as usual' arrangements, evolved and managed for lesser historic events.
8. Resultant transfer of responsibility to rapidly overstretched local (ground-zero) fire fighters and communities.
9. In unprecedented multiple conflagrations, covering extensive areas across the nation, over months: Black Spring-&-Summer OVERWHELM.

That is, the failure begins with leadership failure: to accept and then act on essential scientific and firefighting information ("blind freddie"). In summary, leadership cannot manage risk if it can't (= won't) see the range of risk, or manage its otherwise predictable evolution.

There needs to be comprehensive cultural change at the top regarding information integrity, if any climate related disasters are to be properly perceived and managed (averted or minimalised).

Donald Trump's 'leadership' of America's Covid19 emergency response is comparable to the Morrison handling of Black Spring-&-Summer.

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

There are four matters I wish to cover:

1. A comparison of PM Scott Morrison's handling of the Black Spring-&-Summer with the Covid19 outbreak. Both are global phenomenon, with major impacts on persons, places and economies -- these critically dependent on informed competent governance.
2. Identification of the seat of crippling climate change denial within the current conservative government.
3. A summary of my professional background.
4. Flawed primary input to this Royal Commission due to time constraints.

I note that, due to personal demands posed by Covid19 conditions and time limits placed on this Royal Commission, my submission is anecdotal rather than professionally prepared (that is, properly researched and referenced).

1. PM Scott Morrison's leadership: Black Spring-&-Summer Bushfires 2019/2020 and the Covid19 pandemic

On either the 7 or 8 April, PM Scott Morrison and his medical advisor Professor Brendan Murphy informed the Australian public (via live TV)

about the scientific basis that underpinned the government's calculated handling of the Covid19 outbreak within this country. I was particularly struck by Morrison's comments: that the best scientific advice and information had been gathered and expertly modeled to indicate (as best possible) trends and most likely scenarios, dependent on various inputs; that the Government's choices involve difficult real-life trade-offs, balancing health and economic outcomes; that these choices are based on the most reliable data, information and expert advice, and updated as new information comes to hand.

I am also impressed by Australia's coordinated approach, rapidly employed once the Government perceived then accepted the reality of a highly intrusive damaging pandemic: substantial expert science and modeling; fully informed leadership, and a likewise peak body drawn from all States (leaders and chief medical advisors) negotiating and coordinating the national approach, to be effected at the State level. The results have been rapid and impressive: Australia has one of the most controlled outbreaks in the world, our health system remaining operational, our basic services and supplies still intact.

One can only imagine the outcry if the Murdoch media consistently declared the virus a hoax; medical scientists as a sham profession, cooking the Covid data; the federal government captive to enemies of freedom, who have conspired to have us all in lock down and tracked by our mobile phones. Or the ensuing chaos, should sections of the public go to war on the issues (as we're now seeing in the United States -- potentially catastrophic disease spread, via close-packed protest crowds). Or if PM Morrison went on holiday coincident with breaking pandemic disaster, or made a "For we are jolly good fellows" film clip on behalf of the Liberal party, after thousands had been hospitalised or died.

The contrast between the government approach to Covid19, and its response to credible climate and environmental science -- fundamental to effective counter-disaster management, both before and during the unfolding 2019/2020 bushfire disaster -- is instructive; in fact, couldn't be greater. Tragically, Australian 'leadership' over the weeks of Black Spring & Summer, during multiple firestorms which affected the nation as never before in European settlement history, was a disaster in itself -- was indeed THE seeding disaster, which left States and communities scrambling in the extraordinary unfolding of conflagration after conflagration.

The chain of failure, which I outlined in the previous section, was absolutely avoided in the whole-of-government response to the Covid19 crisis, and absolutely embraced before and during Black Spring&Summer. Why?

2. The seat of crippling climate change denial and failed counter disaster management within the current conservative government. In 1992 I was a Masters student at the University of Melbourne (Applied Science, Geographic Information Systems - GIS). Melbourne University's GIS facility was located in the Department of Geomatics (Surveying), within the Engineering Faculty. There was significant cutting-edge GIS research within the department, including bushfire modelling work done for the Victorian Government.

My thesis was focused on applied biodiversity conservation in working landscapes (rural, urban and industrial), using satellite imagery and GIS analytic capability to assess remnant habitat patterning and then identify optimal protection and restoration opportunities. My research involved a review of remnant habitat at the national level, because substantial scientific research showed that the national parks system could not guarantee survival of Australia's endemic biodiversity. That is, conservation measures had to extend to the broader landscape if indigenous ecosystems and species are to persist into the future.

These post graduate studies coincided with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) -- the Rio Earth Summit -- of June 1992, and the subsequent ratification of two legally binding Conventions: the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, both of which were legally operative by early 1994.

My research into Australia's forest cover and land-clearing rates and controls, for the purposes of applied biodiversity conservation, had crossover with greenhouse science. Not long after John Howard's election (March 1996), I had a short phone conversation with the chairman of the national Greenhouse Office (I can't recall the exact name of the office or the chair), who, clearly upset, told me in no uncertain terms that scientists on the national advisory committee were outraged at the inclusion of business interests. Additionally, around this time I became aware of newspaper articles, mainly in the Sun-Herald paper, that clearly did not represent climate science at all accurately. I wrote letters to the editor in reply. None were published. The stream of 'unscience' continued unabated, without adequate reply.

I withdrew input as a waste of time, and watched with increasing alarm the Howard government's progressive trashing of credible climate and environmental science -- with indispensable support from the Murdoch press and identifiable shock jocks (Andrew Bolt; Alan Jones) -- and the chaos it brought about both within the country and the international community, regarding climate science and mitigation negotiations.

I also noted a concurrent shift in Australia's internationally regarded environmental science community: fear -- of loss: of funding; of research continuity; of tenure; of whole research programmes. For example, after the Howard government insisted on partial industry funding of Australian Cooperative Research Centres, a colleague with senior status in the CRC for Tropical Savannah Management informed me that, once industry paid up and its representatives attended meetings, detailed minutes were no longer kept, and certain research programmes were downscaled or even discontinued on the threat of withdrawal of essential industry funding. He specifically mentioned complex research into the effects of cattle grazing on the ecology of native tropical grasslands (of enormous geographic extent) as a specific example. There are parallels in other branches of environmental science, including climate science.

The assault on climate science and industry takeover of the Australian Government's climate change policy and actions (nationally and internationally) is comprehensively documented by Professor Clive Hamilton in his book "Scorcher: the dirty politics of climate change" (2007). In particular, he refers to a doctoral thesis by Guy Pearce ("The business response to climate change: case studies of Australian interest groups", Australian National University, July 2005), a (former?) Liberal party member, and previous advisor to Environment Minister Robert Hill.

Hamilton writes in 2007: "Guy Pearce...managed to coax the leading members of the fossil fuel lobby into frank admissions about how they go about their business. It emerges that climate change policy in Canberra has for years been determined by a small group of lobbyists who happily describe themselves as the 'Greenhouse Mafia'. This cabal consists of the executive directors of a handful of industry associations in the coal, oil, cement, aluminium, mining and electricity industries. Almost all of these industry lobbyists have been plucked from the senior ranks of the Australian Public Service, where they wrote briefs and Cabinet submission, and advised ministers on energy policy. The revolving door between the bureaucracy and industry lobby groups has given the fossil fuel industries unparalleled insight into the policy process and networks throughout Government.

The members of the Greenhouse mafia claim to be more familiar with greenhouse policy than the Government, because they are the ones who wrote it. As one bragged: "We know more about energy policy than the government does... We know where every skeleton in the closet is -- most of them we buried." " (Hamilton 2007, pp10-11).

Hamilton summarises the depth of denial and indifference to outcomes, inherent in unsound Government policy, recently on full display in crippled national bushfire risk assessment and response measures over the months of Black Spring & Summer -- that is, fatally undermined leadership. He writes: "In preparing this book, I have read volumes of public and private correspondence between members of the greenhouse mafia and between them and the Government. It is truly striking that not once in their commentary have any of them expressed concern about climate change. There is nothing about the fate of poor people in developing countries, no sign of regard for those who may be displaced from their island homes, no mention of the potentially devastating effect on the environment in Australia -- the Barrier Reef, Kakadu, mountain ecosystems -- or the plight of farmers driven from their land by never-ending drought. Nothing. Only one issue preoccupies them: how to protect the profits of the fossil fuel-based industries. How do these people square what they are doing with their conscience? DO THEY EVER WORRY ABOUT THE APPALLING CONSEQUENCES IF THEY ARE WRONG?" (my emphasis) (Hamilton 2007, p. 232).

Clearly NOT. This was most evident in the Morrison government's failure to respond in any practical way to the collective statement of former senior Australian fire and emergency service leaders ("Australia Unprepared for Worsening Extreme Weather", April 2019), or even meet their representative, when the potential for comprehensive summer bushfire catastrophe, on the back of unprecedented drought, was becoming clear -- at least to field experts. One can only imagine the uproar if our Prime Minister failed to consider expert health advice, or meet with such representation, during the emergence of the Covid19 outbreak.

The bushfire contrast could not be more stark, and in fact suggests culpability by omission. Given that the Morrison government has demonstrated entirely competent science-based hazard management in another area entirely, the 2019/2020 bushfires failure suggests wilful negligence, and the possibility of a national class action.

I conclude that a critical sector of national governance -- national disaster response planning and management, clearly reliant on accurate climate and related environmental science -- has indeed been overtaken (that is, corrupted) through identifiable industry takeover, and that this interest continues to operate with appalling effect on the nation and national interest, as demonstrated in the bushfire events now under examination. I also note Australia's identifiable lead role in intentionally confusing and confounding international climate change science and counter-arrangements.

I suggest, as a matter of prime importance, that those familiar with the orchestrated discreditation of national and international science -- a campaign essential to industry takeover of national climate policy; one also feeding systemic failure of Australia's disaster response measures -- be interviewed by the Commissioners, especially:

\* Clive Hamilton, Professor of Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University, Canberra -- researcher and author, climate change policy.

\* Guy Pearce, insider, Howard administration, and researcher.

\* Former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, who recently publicly identified the conservative government and the Murdoch press as distorting the realities and thus real risks of climate change.

I furthermore suggest that such intentional systemic undermining of information critical to government risk assessment and management during the emergence of real climate change, and thus to public safety and the national interest, should be subject to formal investigation by an anti-corruption agency. I note the lack of such a body in Commonwealth matters, and the urgent need for the establishment of the proposed National Integrity Commission.

The linked cartoon succinctly describes corrupted governance in crisis circumstances, and can be easily translated to portray Australian counter-bushfire governance:

<https://firstdogonthemoon.com.au/cartoons/2020/04/21/someone-had-a-worse-response-to-coronavirus-than-boris-johnson/>

### 3. Summary: professional background

\* 1988-91: Bachelor of Science, James Cook University, Townsville

\* 1991: Fresh water ecology research, Water Studies Centre, Monash University.

\* 1992-1996: Master of Applied Science (GIS), University of Melbourne (part time -- unfinished)

\* 1993-1997: Various field research work, freshwater and coastal ecology

\* 1999-2000: Land clearing assessment officer, Queensland Dept of Natural Resources

\* 2001-2005: Coordinator, local environment and planning group, Magnetic Island, Queensland

\* 2006-2007: Master of Planning, University of Otago, Dunedin (unfinished). Substantial research into bushfire, cyclone and seismic response planning and management for thesis purposes.

\* 2012-2013: Biodiversity Coordinator, Waitaki District Council, New Zealand

\* 2020: Master of Planning and Management of Natural Hazards, University of New England -- underway.

My studies have been severely disrupted by serious chronic illness in an immediate family member over decades.

My employment and studies have also been disrupted due to my detection and reporting of corrupted and/or dangerously failed governance within various institutions: Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Townsville and North West Districts; University of Otago, Dunedin; Waitaki District Council, Otago.

All involved environmental matters. One case involved government disregard for substantive science and known risk, with potential catastrophic mortality outcome, presenting striking parallel to the recent failed risk assessment and management of actualised 2019/2020 bushfires .

### 4. Flawed primary input to this Royal Commission due to time constraints.

This Royal Commission was established at the end of the 2019/2020 bushfires disaster, coincident with the emergence of the Covid19 outbreak. Persons, organisations and communities most directly affected by the fires -- those burned out (literally) -- are unlikely, in the compounded circumstances, to be able to make the submissions they'd like to. That is, those most affected by the events under examination are also likely to be those most constrained by the given timeframe, depriving the Royal Commission of invaluable primary information.

I strongly urge the Commissioners to request an extension of the overall timeframe, to allow a much longer submission period that respects the circumstances of those most affected and deprived. It's the least the Morrison government can do, by way of redress.

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