

Submission Number: NND.001.01327

Submission Of: Rachel Coffey

Your Details

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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? Mornington Peninsula, Victoria

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?
The coordination effort to fight fires as they raged across all states of the country was an unenviable task. I'm so thankful to the thousands of volunteers who fought the fires and helped communities in the crisis. The fact that more lives and homes weren't lost is a testament to this coordination effort.
Communication from fire authorities was clear.
The closing of roads throughout Victoria and NSW in anticipation of extreme fire danger days was effective in reducing unnecessary travel, as well as sending a message about the seriousness of the risk to all Australians. The compliance with current COVID-19 'stay at home' orders further exemplifies how effectively we can limit movement at times of extreme risk to public and emergency workers. This is possibly something that could be expanded upon in future days of catastrophic fire risk.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?
Hazard reduction plays a significant role in reducing fire risk, however the 2019/20 summer fires showed that our strategy has not been working. The Gippsland region of Victoria had a huge amount of planned burns carried out in the previous decade, yet that area was still hit very hard this summer. The Government should expand its support of cultural burning practices and traditional fire management knowledge. Tens of thousands of years of strategic fire management should be valued and given a leading place in our planning moving forward.

Life and property are rightly a focus of fire prevention, but biodiversity protection is equally important. Slashing and clearing should be reserved for the fringes of built-up residential areas, with different strategies in place for bushland. Broad-scale planned burning can damage the biodiversity that it seeks to protect. Any planned burns should seek to protect old-growth forest. The habitat value of old trees must be recognised. Hollows in old trees and logs take decades to form and in many areas are irreplaceable habitat for wildlife. The conservation of old growth forests and biodiversity should be a primary concern when it comes to fuel and land management.

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?
Many scientists have determined that climate change is a key factor in exacerbating the risk of bushfires in Australia. Drought caused by climate change poses an increasing threat to not only the severity of the fires, but also our ability to prepare for them.

There is scientific consensus that climate change is predominately caused by the burning of fossil fuels. To reduce the risk of catastrophic fires, we must transition from fossil fuel energy as soon as possible - including coal, oil and gas.

The Federal Government should commit to stronger climate change mitigation strategies (in line with the Paris Agreement) to keep warming well below 2 degrees.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?
Salvage logging and any kind of logging within fire impacted regions should be stopped immediately. These areas are under intense stress as the plants and wildlife attempt to recover. Any unburned areas of forest are critical habitat for remaining wildlife.

The Government should instead be directing funding in the post- COVID-19 recovery towards biodiversity protection. Local and regional economies can be stimulated through environmental recovery.

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