

Submission Number: NND.001.01343

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? Bega Valley (A)

Your Submission

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

The Rural Fire Service, under extreme conditions were amazing.

Our local mayor, Kristy McBain and local journalist [REDACTED] did a fantastic job keeping our community update in a clear and concise manner with regular communications online.

Community groups, such as Surf Life Saving Clubs opened their doors and assisted where they could... ie in Bermagui when the Gorge Bass marathon was meant to be happening, they cancelled the event and went into volunteer mode to help evacuees on what was a very frightening few nights in Bermagui.

Local General Practitioners, in the absence of adequate first aid response, set up mobile clinics and rotating rosters at evacuation centres to triage health complaints. They engaged their own nursing staff and other nursing staff to manage these clinics. They engaged with local pharmacies for medication supplies and assistance with prescription needs.

The sense of community banding together was immense at the same time as being incredibly sad and frustrated.

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

Our Prime Minister jetting off to Hawaii in the midst of the early stages of the bushfire crisis and telling the public that the volunteer fire fighters want to be out fight fighting fires. This lack of leadership was keenly felt on the ground in the affected areas. So, so out of touch, it was heartbreaking.

Medical and medication supplies were in an abysmal situation during the crisis. I am a pharmacist and being in an area cut off by road, meant we couldn't get orders in time and when they did make it through, we struggled with supply limitations.

Food and fuel could get through, how on earth medicines and medical supplies were not included as essential supplies is beyond me.

We should not have had to wait until the crisis to be half way through to be sent masks from govt stockpiles.

We should not have had to order and ration our own essential medications such as inhalers, wound dressings, burn treatments and indeed medicines for standard health conditions. Hospitals would not need an influx of people with health issues that have arisen due to them not getting their regular medicines. As for the current crisis of Covid-19, there should be a centralised supply facility for such items to be dispatched as quickly as possible to affected towns through the right resources and channels.

Discount stores and hardware stores were sent masks before we could obtain them, which was frankly ridiculous.

This central store should be available for distributing essential medical supplies, private practice and businesses should not have to rely on buying stock to sell on for emergency purposes.

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

Local health care providers need to be included in disaster management planning. GPs, local nurses and pharmacists are absolutely pivotal to continuing health care in communities when disaster strike, include them and medical supply chains in disaster planning.

Keep local papers incentivised to keep in print.... not everyone has access to the internet, and indeed in the height of the crisis and someone has lost their home, they should have access to news and information in a printed format.

Make sure there are still public phones available in towns, even if people still have their mobile devices, they may well have run out of battery or credit so they must have a way of keeping in touch.

Don't ask for these submissions in the immediate aftermath of such disasters.... have a little compassion and insight into how traumatised a community is, and how raw the hurt is, we need time and adequate space to gather thoughts to put such submissions together.

Give the community time to attend the in person meetings to put forward their thoughts, again, perhaps come to these towns in the early phases, but equally come back in 3 or 6 months, give people time and space so they can formulate their response as they see fit to give it.

Be realistic.... some of these towns have been almost decimated, do you really think people have access to the internet to put a submission together.

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

This cannot happen again... listen to our First Nation people and take their advice on how to do slow burns.

Listen to the importance of Climate Change and do something concrete about it, the time period for hazard reduction burning is narrowing as the climate changes... listen to the rural fire service about the limitations they face.

Fund all these bodies appropriately.... they should not have to rely on donations to run their volunteer stations... it is mind blowing that they cannot be funded fully yet be on call to do such dangerous work. I speak of the RFS and surf life saving clubs, of which many volunteers cross

over with service. The distribution of both volunteer organisations into regional Australia should be utilised for adequate on the ground, local responses in times of crisis. Fund them properly, don't make them rely on donations.

Reimburse or financially compensate these fire fighters for the time they put in and the work they lose out on when volunteering.

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