



**Royal Commission**  
into National Natural  
Disaster Arrangements

## Submission Cover Sheet

This cover sheet has been prepared by the Commission's public contact team to accompany a submission.

### Person completing cover sheet

1. **Staff member name** [REDACTED]
2. **Date completed** 25.03.2020
3. **This cover sheet has been completed based on:**
  - details contained in the submission
  - a phone call with the person making the submission
  - an email from the person making the submission
  - Other (provide details) -

### Submission details

4. **Full name** David Parkinson
5. **Email** [REDACTED]
6. **Telephone** [REDACTED]
7. **Preferred method of contact** Either
8. **Is the submission based on:**
  - primarily based on their personal situation.
  - primarily based on their professional knowledge, qualifications or experience, or on behalf of a group or organisation
9. **If the person is making the submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation:**

If the submission based on personal experience:

10. **What was their personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires? Choose all that apply.**
    - were not living in an area affected by bushfire
    - were in an area affected by bushfires but was not evacuated, and didn't suffer personal or financial loss
    - lived in an area affected by bushfires and was evacuated, but didn't suffer personal or financial loss
-

- lived in an area affected by bushfires and was evacuated, and I suffered personal or financial loss
- part of the emergency response as a fire fighter on the ground
- part of the emergency response as an aerial fire fighter
- part of the emergency response as health professional
- part of the emergency response as an Australian Defence Force member
- part of the emergency response as a Commonwealth or State government employee
- assisted the emergency response as a community support volunteer
- assisted the emergency recovery (i.e. after the fire event) as a community support volunteer
- Other

**11. Where does the person live:**

Local Government Area

Richmond Valley

Town name

██████████

Post code

██████

If the submission is based on professional experience

**12. What is your area of expertise? Please choose all that apply.**

- Emergency/disaster response and/or management
- Environment/land management
- Land use, planning, building standards
- Impacts of changes in climatic conditions
- Wildlife conservation
- Traditional land and fire management practices of Indigenous Australians
- Community welfare
- Other

All submissions

**13. Does the person agree to their submission being published?**

- Yes, agree to the submission being published in their name
  - Yes, agree to the submission being published anonymously
  - No, does not agree to the submission being published
-

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Dear Sir/Madam

I make this submission believing that your commission will benefit from input by ordinary people concerned by the events of the past summer and their impact on our country's quality of life.

Earlier in my life I had the privilege of serving twenty years as a councillor of my local council and a number of committees involved in local matters. During that time I found that local knowledge was largely ignored when confronted by higher authorities which lead to this submission.

- I cite an occasion when a bush fire located in our Council area was taken over by state fire authorities which lead to mistakes being made through ignorance of local conditions. This was compounded during the subsequent debriefing when untruths were told to cover those mistakes. This particular fire burnt out areas that would have not necessarily been affected had the local knowledge been listened to. We lost one fire fighter during that event although that death is not contributed to leadership. The point I make is clearly there is room for collective decision making when it comes to local matters.

As a councillor I was asked to be part of an advisory committee formed for Bundjalung and Broadwater National Parks. I enjoyed that position even though the arguments between various factions, those who wished to preclude people from all parks to those like myself who saw an opportunity to use the parks both for recreation as well as education. Compromise was obtained but that committee never really worked as a team as each side used what opportunities that existed to push their agendas. One area we did agree on was the need to control the build up of fuel in the parks by burning off using a grid pattern. A five year program was put in place, even though much of these parks were swampy and difficult to burn during the winter period, that was considered the best period to implement the control. While National Parks agreed with this strategy back in 1970 it has never been carried out and today we saw Bundjalung Park burn uncontrollably because of the huge build up of fuel.

Again when a Councillor I was involved in an exercise when my council was asked to consider making an emergency plan to cover a catastrophic event within its own area. The matter raised suggested we prepare for any or all of the following:

1. Flooding
2. Bush fire
3. Tsunami or tidal wave,
4. Major road accident or airline crash
5. Shut down of essential services such as electricity, water, sewerage, etc.

It was soon apparent that our task would involve other agencies with local government fitting into a much wider organisation required to cover such an emergency.

The enormity of this exercise will be immediately apparent and brings up control problems as outlined in my fire point. From the outset leadership needs to be specifically spelled out so egos, status or a position within an organisation doesn't create chaos.

For such an organisation to work every point must be identified so that each agency knows where they fit into such a collective.

While this exercise was done to give local government an opportunity to prepare itself for such an emergency it immediately identified problems likely to occur.

Ironically these same problems have identified themselves during the current bush fire crisis and helps make the point of how difficult it will be in bringing all government agencies together without a detailed plan in place.

One thing that must be emphasised is the need to take into consideration local knowledge even though the event might require emergency services such as the army being involved. If we are going to be fair dinkum about creating such a detailed plan then the minds at the highest level need to be involved as well as allowing for local knowledge to be included.

On another level there is currently some disquiet within the community on the distribution of monies raised to assist those who have lost homes etc.

The argument raised is why should people who take the responsible approach of insuring their homes not be considered for assistance in the distribution of monies. To me it seems more logical to combine all money available so that an even distribution can be made. We are not looking to deprive people rather the opposite in fact and such an approach would be fairer.

Rereading this submission I would like to emphasise the following points:

- Ignoring local knowledge would be a disaster
- Preparation of a disaster plan is essential but must take into consideration the nature of the disaster and what leadership should be put in place. Then a hierarchy designed to include locals with the right information involved, but not necessarily in leadership positions.
- In the case of bush fires a country wide system of burning off or hazard reduction must be considered a priority. It could include un or underemployed people signed up for a peace type corp.
- Future planning laws must take into consideration bush fires/floods and restrict building in hazardous areas.
- Once such new regulations have been agreed to they must be put to the community in a consultative manner so that all are involved in 'the' plan. That plan then is owned by all, understood and supported.

