



## Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

# Submission Form

Please complete this form if you would like to provide input or comments about coordination, preparedness for, response to and recovery from the 2019-20 'Black Summer' bushfires.

## Personal and Background Information

1. Full Name [REDACTED]
2. Email [REDACTED]
3. Mobile/Telephone
4. What is your preferred method of contact if we want to follow up with you?

email

5. The Commission would like to understand the views of community groups based on their respective experiences and background.
  - a. Please select Option 1 if you are providing input and comments primarily based on your personal situation.
  - b. Please select Option 2 if you are providing input and comments primarily based on your professional knowledge, qualifications or experience, or on behalf of a group or organisation

**Option 1:** Based on your personal situation, please complete the following.

- a. What was your personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires? Please choose all that apply.
  - I was not living in an area affected by bushfire
  - I lived in an area affected by bushfires but was not evacuated, and didn't suffer personal or financial loss
  - I lived in an area affected by bushfires and was evacuated, but didn't suffer personal or financial loss
  - I lived in an area affected by bushfires and was evacuated, and I suffered personal or financial loss
  - I was part of the emergency response as a fire fighter on the ground
  - I was part of the emergency response as an aerial fire fighter

- I was part of the emergency response as health professional
- I was part of the emergency response as an Australian Defence Force member
- I was part of the emergency response as a Commonwealth or State government employee
- I assisted the emergency response as a community support volunteer
- I assisted the emergency recovery (i.e. after the fire event) as a community support volunteer
- Other

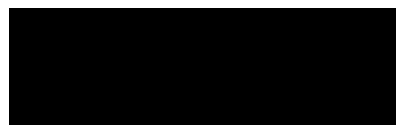
Not directly impacted by the fires of this season but have been previously been affected.

- b. Where do you live? Please provide your Local Government Area, town name and post code.

Local Government Area

Town name

Post code



**Option 2:** Based on your knowledge, qualifications or experience, or your role representing a group or organisation, 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
- TOR 1-2 and 3



## Input / Comments

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

The overall coordination in the face of such an unprecedented disaster from the RFS was commendable, despite being hampered by lack of equipment and resourcing, as well as facing communication difficulties. The state RFS managed fairly well but they need greater resourcing.

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

One of the major concerns was the backburning that took place amidst the fire events, for example in Gospice Valley and on the South Coast. They caused more damage and loss of homes than they prevented. The practice of backburning, now that we have unprecedented fires, is ineffectual and dangerous.

I feel that initial government responses, both state and federal, were particularly slow. That the response should have been implemented sooner, including much greater resourcing of the NSW RFS and greater commonwealth firefighting resources on the ground. These changes are needed because of the scale of fire activities we are experiencing because of climate change.

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

I feel that we need to substantially increase the resources available to state government and RFS etc to adequately fight these unprecedented bushfire events. We also need to greatly increase investments in remote-area firefighting units because so many of the fires are in remote places. I feel there was a lack of resourcing and lack of protocol to deal with these fires. Remote fires needed to be responded to in a much quicker way. We had a fire, called Palmers Oaky Fire, and this was a fire that started as a result of farming equipment north of Bathurst and it was started as a result of farming equipment. It was in remote country, and we have great local brigades, but they needed much greater resourcing and backup to try and contain that fire sooner. That is an example of a need for greater resourcing for fires in remote wilderness and in remote terrain more quickly so that they don't threaten to escalate into fires that burn for weeks and threaten communities and towns.

I think we need to really assess and question the viability of backburning during very large scale events. I also feel we need to increase our commitment of resources to community fire-planning methods of protecting our communities. For example in our town the whole focus is on making ourselves resilient to fire. This needs to happen not just in rural areas but also in towns and villages. Households in towns should have had separate firefighting gear to some level, not just those in the bush. This needs to be encouraged at the local, state and federal level.

We also need to seriously look at benefits available from Indigenous land management practices because the windows available to conduct proscribed burning, as acknowledged by Shane Fitzsimmons are becoming smaller. We need to look other strategies that are available.

There was lot of misinformation from government about the causes of the fires. For example it was suggested that most of the fires were started by arsonists, which was incorrect. Most of the fires came from storm-events. We need an across the board understanding across government that climactic change is the greatest threat with these fires. And we need to acknowledge that these climactic conditions are our greatest impediment to mitigating fire risk, not things like arson. This needs to come from state and federal level.

As a landholder, in my experience in the Palmers Oaky fire this season, and in my experience of previous fires, they have occurred because of the use of farming equipment on hire fire-danger or severe fire-danger days. Local RFS brigades don't have legislative power to prevent farm activity during such days. They do their best to persuade farmers not to conduct risky activities on high-risk days but they need to have legislative powers which grant them authority to prevent farming when required. Perhaps the increasing of fines to ensure that farmers will actually follow such directives, or some other type of legal consequences, would be appropriate. In my experience the majority of fire events that we have experienced have come from farming activity. This is what happened in the Palmers Oaky fire. We need to make serious legislative changes to prevent farming from taking place during high-risk times.

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

I would like to make a statement on the drought and the changes in climate. I would like to let the Commission know that as a landholder I have witnessed extreme drought over the past 3 years and as a result of that, much reduced rainfall and a change in seasonal weather patterns. I have witnessed longer, dryer, hotter summers, shorter winters and less winter and spring rainfall. And so personally I am witnessing incredible change in our usual weather patterns and there is no doubt in my or my families experience that climate change is an irrefutable fact. These changing conditions and the horrendous fire season we have just experienced are directly linked. As a result I would like to see resources for our local RFS brigades increase dramatically. We are members of two local RFS brigades, and I can't say enough positive things about them and I'm aware how much additional resourcing they require.

I would also like to make a comment about the environment. We as landholders work very hard to maintain the biodiversity of the land and to protect the native wildlife that reside on it. As witnessed during the Blue Mountains fires this season, so much crucial biodiversity was lost in these fires and we need to be targeting that as an asset during bushfire planning and risk management. We need to be preserving bushland as it is crucial for biodiversity and threatened species. There is no research that I have read that suggests that logging of national parks, or grazing, as the Nationals have argued, would have any positive impact on reducing fire risk. It would only serve to devastate that national asset that we have and the threatened species that are really vital to us. The changes to the NSW biodiversity legislation over the last few years have seen a huge increase in land clearing, and I feel that that here locally and on a state basis that has contributed to escalated climactic change. It has really accelerated and has decimated animals and habitat. I feel that has contributed greatly. So we have to act to restore biodiversity that we have lost, because it has contributed to the drought, which in turn contributes to the change in weather patterns we have witnessed. State and Federal governments need to immediately act to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gasses and increase investment in renewable technologies, especially in rural areas. Our family has lived off the grid for 11 years, and we are working really really hard to increase the biodiversity on this land and we're doing all of that without any government assistance whatsoever. We have done everything possible to mitigate our own fire risk. If we as a nation could provide the investment that is needed to help people mitigate their fire risk it would be a great help to every village and community.

Do you intend to provide supporting material?

Yes

No

If you are providing any supporting material, please include it with your Submission if possible. If you need to send it separately (e.g. if you make a Submission over the phone), please ensure supporting material can be clearly identified as relating to your Submission by including your name or other identifier so that it can be considered with your Submission.

**10. Do you agree to your submission being published? (Mandatory)**

Yes, I agree to my submission being published in my name

Yes I agree to my submission being published anonymously

No I don't agree to my submission being published

Once you have completed this form, email it to [rcnda.submissions@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:rcnda.submissions@royalcommission.gov.au) or print the form and post it to the Royal Commission at:

National Natural Disaster Royal Commission

Locked Bag 2000

Manuka ACT 2603

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