



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 [REDACTED]
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: X

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
 - X. 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

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

Local Government Area	Choose an item. Eurobodalla
Town name	Surf Beach (10k south of Batemans Bay)
Post code	2536

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
-

Input / Comments

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

RFS were the absolute hero's.

Although unable to fight the fire in our small enclave and many homes were due to the ferocity & spread of the fire front the RFS worked tirelessly throughout the Batemans area from November until we had rain in February & the fires were officially extinguished.

NSW Government was fast to respond to the widespread devastation & deserve credit for organising services across essential & support services & coordinated a wide range of complex needs.

- A. The Evacuation centres managed people very well considering the number of locals & visitors in the area. They also had additional issues to when one of the local aged care facilities evacuated all residents to the Batemans Bay centre.
- B. The Emergency Response centre effectively facilitated co-ordinating state based essential services & did a great job organising immediate issues particularly reconnecting electricity (back to most people within 5 days), getting comms organised & managing convoys of fuel & groceries into the affected areas. There were lots of other support services in play that few realised were providing essential services in a calm, quiet & professional manner, in particular our local hospital had to manage their normal work using generators, taking in additional patients & acted as an overnight respite for those with breathing issues who needed masks & ventilation to survive.

Federal Government response when it came was welcome & the payments much needed & well received.

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

Local council closure of services to the public until 13th January

I appreciate that Eurobodalla council was providing services via the emergency response centre & depot staff were working hard throughout this time, however councils decision to close office services after the New Year fires until January 13th I think was very ill advised and disappointing for the community during this time when information & communications were scarce.

Of particular concern to me was the lack of recognition of their duty of care to those that they provide services to through the NDIS & their social support division. The council receives funding by both the state & federal governments to support these venerable people in the community and it seems they were essentially abandoned by council during this time.

I feel it is important to note the stark difference in community support during this time. While the council executives & staff, who are paid to lead & manage in our community, closed the main office & many services post the fires others in the community provided support in many ways to those in need & expected nothing for their efforts. From the SES volunteers working round the clock, to neighbours taking people they didn't know to evacuations centres, to individuals undertaking health checks on the elderly, to the staff at Batemans Bay Coles,

(initially the only store to have a generator,) most of whom are casual employee, sleeping in in aisles to ensure that people had food when the grocery trucks arrived.

Damaged & dangerous tree assessment

Extensive parts of our property were burnt out & we had no communications or electricity for an extended period. In fact we had no electricity for four weeks, though unlike our immediate neighbours still had our home. With communicating difficult & fuel limited for some time even making phone calls was difficult. My tree issue was that we had quite a few burnt & burnt out trees on the property that I felt might be dangerous to people, animals & property and I wanted to know who I could ask about the safety & viability of those trees. The council was closed, RFS referred me to SES, & the SES weren't sure if they provided this service.

I was not alone with the confusion & I believe because of this people, particularly those on larger rural blocks, have subsequently been culling trees & in some instances have left the chopped trees where they fell, adding to future fuel for fires.

Ultimately many of the trees on our property have come back to life but again I had no idea & it would have been helpful to have a reference point for support. My only reference point with regard to trees was that when we built our home 8 years ago the local council had to approve what trees could stay & what could be cut down so they would have been my port of call.

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?

Fires burning in the area from November & then the closure of the Kings Highway

2019 was a very dry year & in the area I live we had high winds throughout Winter had which hampered back-burning in and around our region. This was absolutely a contributing factor. That aside the length of time multiple fires burnt around the area from November onwards was, I think, too much for our stretched volunteer brigades to manage. The Princes Highway was closed intermittently for fires in November & December & I believe that this & the subsequent closure of the Kings Highway should have been when all available resources were utilised to stopping the progress of the fires before they joined up, jumped the Kings highway & headed south where they fires caused so much damage, grief & devastation.

One national body working with state/territory based departments responsible for resourcing & infrastructure for natural disaster with particular emphasis bush fires & cyclones/major floor events.

The NSW government & I suspect their counterparts in Victoria did a very good job during and post the fires & have a skill base for recovery management however pre planning & resourcing for disaster requires major investments & coordination across the country.

In relation to our summer bushfire season, issues like areal firefighting resource management need to be financed & coordinated by a national body. Personally I think people are not going to be happy with an outcome of another layer of government strategy & however there does need to be coordinate with & learning from state & territory experiences & support them by providing & coordinated major resources.

Back burning & Cool burning

Both options need to be part of the structure, research & future management of bush fires.

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

No

Do you intend to provide supporting material?

Yes

X. 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

X. 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 or print the form and post it to the Royal Commission at:

National Natural Disaster Royal Commission

Locked Bag 2000

Manuka ACT 2603
