



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

Mobile

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

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

Local Government Area	Wellington
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
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Input / Comments

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

The Victorian Police were fantastic in fulfilling their roles at relief centres and also at all the road blocks. I can say that in and out of the red zones that all members were at all times approachable, sympathetic, assisted at times with resource (helped move some small amount of goods), security and did not impede at any time the need to move through the road blocks and the delivery of emergency and material aid and in the need of those forward field coordination requirements

Equally the deployment of the Australian Army was a very positive one. Both regular and non-regular army were of high value. Again they assist at many levels and personally were able to assist me with the provision of personnel and resources in providing those humanitarian requirements to those affected by natural disaster.

Throughout my disaster experiences I have often dealt with media (Ch7, ABC news, SBS, ABC Radio, 3AW, TVNZ3, countless newspaper and documentary makers) and find that they can be very effective platform in distribution of important information quickly and also for people in understanding the lived experience of survivors.

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

It was my experience based at the Bairnsdale football oval that there were no key lead agencies that were interested in collating volunteers or material aid. Nevertheless hundreds of tonnes were generated throughout the state and much of those donations were arriving at Bairnsdale football oval.

It was evident early on after spending approx. 6 weeks in the fire affected areas from Sale, Bairnsdale, Bruthen, Buchan, Lakes Entrance, Mallacoota, Genoa, Omeo, Swifts Creek, Coryong, and after spending approx. 10,000 km that there was not a great amount of communication between all the different relief centres or between shires on the distribution of resources or material aid.

Contact numbers often changed at the council led relief centres

It is almost inevitable that a large natural disaster will generate both significant volumes of volunteers and significant amounts of material aid. The notion to just ignore both is not practical and with regards to volunteers is a waste of desperately needed human resource. As I have seen throughout my disaster experiences that many of the community members that assist from the beginning tend to "burn out" by day 7 post disaster event.

I have also found that there is a tendency to close relief centres operations down prematurely.

I completely refute the notion that relief centres should close quickly on the grounds and notion that financial aid is provided to those local residents affected and that they should "spend their

money locally” on local business as flawed and a tired justification often not supported by the local businesses themselves.

Although I was highly visible on most days I tended to find that I was not engaged by council or the key lead agencies even after representing many times to the ICC, providing my details and with also being at the relief centres. In fact some of the information that I have generated was also requested and forwarded onto the ICC. Request for assistance that was offered to me by other people, organisations and on occasion by other councils was forwarded onto council at the ICC and I never received a call back or email. I also requested on several occasions to liaise with key people on council without much success. This just further highlights the consideration that council officers have been overwhelmed and on occasions may not have the lived experience of responding to the level required.

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 believe State and Federal government would benefit from having a core list of recognised individual that are able to be deployed immediately into a disaster affected area in a supportive role where ever it is needed. Provided with some formal recognition based on previous on the ground experience in disaster zones and perhaps with some access to immediate funding to support local individuals or community groups assisting with the relief response. The individuals should not be from the existing key response agencies or NGO,s

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

Local councils and individual and community groups need immediate support from experienced people in the immediate aftermath of a large disaster. This should be recognised and supported. Those key people should not only be those from government or the key lead ngos that normally respond. I believe there is a pool of disaster workers that may be suitable.

There exists a real gap in the coordination of volunteers and material aid particularly when a disaster affects multiple municipalities. Communication, coordination and a sharing of information and resource should be critical for all to access and feed into and not kept in house(ICC or Council)

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

National Natural Disaster Royal Commission
Locked Bag 2000
Manuka ACT 2603
