



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 or mobile phone

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	Choose an item.
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
-

Input / Comments

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

The community response was exceptional. We prepared our own properties and helped the neighbouring property owners and older members of the community with their clean up and fire plan.

The meetings held by the RFS at the Kulnura Hall and the Mangrove Mountain Hall were extremely well attended by locals and provided excellent information to assist with our preparations.

The Fires near me app was useful but certainly not nearly good enough with updating information or providing accurate information in real time.

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

The telecommunications in our region have not improved even after all the publicly funded towers and we are still without reliable phone and internet services.

My partner is a RFS Volunteer and even his pager failed. The RFS were put under enormous pressure with no real effective method of resourcing and fatigue management.

The Captain of his brigade gives no thought to our privacy and it is unacceptable that a RFS volunteer is not provided with a email box or intranet. My partner signed up using our shared email account and it is disseminated without proper care and attention to our privacy.

We had a lot of warnings about the catastrophic conditions many many months before the season but hardly any hazard reduction was done in our region. The fire trails had not been maintained and they were impassible and unusable by the time they were needed

I had contacted Central Coast Council several times regarding Starkey's Reserve which borders our property. It was fuel laden and unkept. Poorly managed and a locked gate prevented the

neighbouring properties from keeping it slashed as had been the habit for the previous 18 years that we have been next door to it.

There is a dead tree that hangs onimously over Wisemans Ferry Road (the only way to get in or our of our area) and poses an unacceptable risk to the residents of Mangrove Mountain as it will block the road at a critical time. I have reported the tree several times and it is still there?

My partner was overworked and fatigued by the time the fire became a threat to us. The RFS in our Region provide an unacceptable level of essential services and this is a complete abuse of the spirit of voluteering. He had attended call outs a least three times a week before the fire season even started. He is called out on windy days because trees fall and block the road. He is called out to motor vehicle accidents to provide traffic control services, he attended hazzard reduction around Origin Energy towers, he was even called out at 5pm to take over a Hazard Reduction burn that was conducted by forestry workers because they were told they would not be paid overtime. My partner does not complain about it but there is no way he would be able to provide all these services if he had a full time job. The farmers in our area are not able to be active RFS members because they work so hard on their farms and this means the local brigade doesn't have sufficient local representaton and even the captain lives in a different area and never attends call outs.

There was no fatigue management of the brigade. Many voluteers attend their day job for 8-12 hours before turning up to do a shift. My partner had completed 30 hours between brigade responsibilities and protecting our own property when he was asked to drive the truck because they were short of truck drivers and he was keen to go but I stopped him because I noticed that his decision making was impaired and he was struggling with anxiety. No one would have stopped him if I didn't? He was distressed that he didn't go our but had 4 hours sleep and went out again?

The fires near me app didn't provide current information for properties very close to the fire ground. It was good general information if you were living at the Central Coast and you wanted to have a rough idea about the progress of the fire but locals depended on the information and we had to make sure they weren't making decisions based on inaccurate information. We had a scanner app and kept up with the fire ground activity and kept our neighbours warned and made sure they were safe. No one else was monitoring some of the older residents and I truly believe they needed help and support from Central Coast Council. It was a lot of pressure on us and one elderly resident told me she was depending on me to let her know when she should evacuate. I found that was an unreasonable amount of pressure.

The evacuation centre set up at the Central Coast Leagues Club was ill conceived and poorly executed. Only two people used it and it was a complete waste of resources. Residents at Mangrove Mountain have animals and although some residents moved their livestock they had to bring them back when fires broke out in other areas. There was nowhere safer for the animals to go and their owners could not leave them unattended and unfed. The offer to take horses to the Gosford Race Track was just plain stupid. You could take your horses there but they needed to remain tied to the float. That is a recipe for disaster. Its hard to think of a worse idea?

Road closure information was incorrect and it was very disturbing that the road blocks were manned by private security contractors. They had no authority to prevent people passing nor did they try. At such a critical time for residents, I believe it is appropriate to have police at road blocks. The live traffic app showed road closures that were not closed. it was very confusing for locals who were afraid to leave the mountain just in case they would be unable to return. It was particularly stressful for parents who never knew if the school bus would be able to bring their children home.

At the eleventh hour, contractors on large earthmoving equipment were deployed to run fire trails and build containment lines. This was a windfall for earthmoving contractors but my observation of their work is that they were not experienced and they did not know the area. Local knowledge was not utilised and a lot of environmental damage was done because "haste makes waste". I would like to see some funding to repair the damage that was done.

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?

The Mangrove Mountain District need to have essential services. It needs a fire and rescue station, a police station, and ambulance station and a Central Coast Council worker who lives in a home with his family at the depot on Bloodtree road. If these services are not planned for in our region nowthen when? There are many towns and suburbs with less population than Mangrove Mountain that have all these services. The RFS volunteers would then not carry the burden of providing all these essential services and get on with the job of attending training and hazard reduction and probably be able to attract members who want to provide these services to their community but can't possibly be available for all the essential services they do currently.

The Mountain Districts need a properly engineered evacuation centre which is in the local area, where people can gather and provide a central location for keeping a check on residents and a gathering place for providing the emotional support that was so sadly lacking during the black summer fires. The chosen place (perhaps one of the three halls that are up here) should have a radio tower (for when the phones fail) a generator, a sprinkler system for the area and some basic medical treatment areas. We have mentioned this to Central Coast Council on many occasions however they have chosen not to engage with the community in their planning for future catastrophic events.

The preparation for the bushfire season was inadequate at best and at worst, I would say that the Central Coast Council, and others with authority, were culpable.

We have experienced Trauma and it started well before the fire progressed towards our property. I have copies of emails that I sent to Council and my elected representatives well before the fire and they remain unanswered and the issue that caused most of my anxiety has still not been dealt with.

We had applied for Hazard reduction work on our land and had some of the areas knocked back because the records showed that the area had been burned 7 years ago. I can state categorically that this area had not been burned in the 18 years we have owned the property. We have made our case but have not had any response. We were refused permission to burn the area and no one has as yet explained how or why the records held at the Kariong Office are incorrect.

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

I recently read Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe and it helped to enlighten me regarding the best way to manage the Australian bush as well as, urban areas and parks and reserves. We have been falsely provided with information from both the "rape and pillage" developers and the "lock up nature" green lobby. The property we live on at Mangrove Mountain has become degraded under our management and I would like to engage with first nations land managers to learn the proper way of creating the park like beauty that the first contact colonisers saw when they arrived and meticulously recorded in their diaries, notes and illustrations.

The fuel load calculation, when applying for a hazard reduction burn, should be arrived at scientifically by taking into account rainfall, growth, undergrowth and prevailing conditions. The measurement used currently is that you can only reduce the fuel load once in 10 years.

RFS Volunteers should not be used to replace essential services. These are real jobs and it is not appropriate for a volunteer to take up a position of a paid employee who can live in the community and whose children can attend the local school and they become part of the community. Real Jobs for Real People!

The way that money was allocated during the catastrophic bush fire season and, more recently, the coronavirus pandemic, makes the case that these services are not affordable a mute argument.

I would like to see many fully funded and well resourced land managers across Australia, who look after "country" using cultural burning principals all year. Training provided to landowners in bushfire prone areas to compliment the work the land managers do, would be the ultimate goal.

10. 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.

11. 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
