



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** Peter Holding
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?

In the myriad of issues experienced during the 2019-2020 bushfire season I would like to focus on fire ground management. In my capacity as a RFS Group Officer I was tasked with leading a team of 13 tankers and crew to the Dunn's Road fire. This is an aspect of firefighting that I have to say has improved considerably over the 40 years I have been involved in firefighting. The teams on the fireground were well resourced and had good command and control on the fire ground. This is important for a number of reasons eg. team safety, rapid redeployment and firefighting efficiency to mention a few.

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

As the fire intensity and number of concurrent incidents increases with climate change impacts the area that didn't work so well was the management of the fire and teams by the Incident controller and their team in the fire control centre and the firefighters on the fire ground. Under the Australian inter-service incident management system under which we operate there seems to be a gap in command between the operations officer, in the incident control centre and the divisional commanders on the ground. This leads to an attempt to manage large fires remotely from what is actually happening on the ground. This has happened many times in the past as fires have grown from small incidents to larger S.44 fires or campaign fires.

The problem is that many ops officers are unable to delegate command to a trusted leader on the fire ground to act as their deputy and thus command and control the various divisions that may be active. This is necessary in large mobile fires to allow the firefighters to be nimble and efficient in what is occurring at any particular time. With the type of fires we saw this year there is also a need to subdivide the large fire into manageable pieces just as is done on the fireground with divisions and sectors. Failure to do this resulted in the incident control being overwhelmed and sections of the fire being forgotten about. This could easily have lead to fire breakouts and injuries except for a bit of luck. Also whilst this is happening a failure to break down the radio system also leads to the network being overloaded and communications failing.

I would point out that on page 132 in the AIMS2017 manual it states that "In large scale incidents where an incident control centre (ICC) is established at some distance from the incident, the operations point may be established and staffed by personnel acting on behalf of the operations officer. The operations officer will be located at the incident control centre in most circumstances."

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?

1. The position of a trusted officer acting as the operations officer's eyes and ears on the fireground needs to be enacted once a S.44 is declared so that a clear chain of command and control is maintained at all times. This person could be called a deputy operations officer or fire boss. It is then their role to command and control all divisions under their control in conjunction with the ops officer and the incident control team at the incident control centre.
2. This on-fireground team then has a designated radio network for communicating between the fire boss and the div comms and sector leaders. A separate designated channel would be used by the fire boss to communicate with the ICC.
3. More training of these leadership teams is required to allow such a system to be implemented quickly and efficiently.

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

The AFAC AIIIMS2017 manual can be obtained here
<https://www.afac.com.au/auxiliary/shop/product?ID=5362>

It would be handy if a virtual copy was available as it might be read more widely.

I believe if this management structure is not put in place it will lead to a lack of command and control. This will lead to people self organising eg mosquito squads. This will inevitably lead to firefighters being trapped and undefendable and killed as has happened in the past. It is why the RFS has developed from farm units in the past.

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
