

Your details

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Consent to make submission public

I would like this submission to remain anonymous

Share your experience or tell your story

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

- The previous years of drought and the warming climate were key drivers of the season.
- Previous large fires such as Wambelong (2013) and Sir Ivan (2017) behaved very much the same under similar circumstances. These events were a clear sign that the previous way fires have behaved was changing under the new prevailing conditions.
- In both these cases the fires burnt both public and private land. There were now strategies available to control

these fires on the catastrophic weather days experienced. There was no effective difference between fire behaviour on public and private land, no hazard reduction or land use was effective in mitigating the impacts of these fires.

- These directly point to the subsequent behaviours experienced in the last fire season – extreme weather conditions driving fire behaviour with fuel loads having very little influence on behaviour on bad weather days.

1.2 Preparation and planning

- Clearly many houses were lost due to historical land use decisions – i.e. construction of dwellings in fire prone areas with limited to no fuel management and unsuitable building standards.
- While many lives were saved due to better warning strategies by emergency services and public awareness as well as the actions of fire fighters, there needs to be assessments completed for all dwellings within or adjacent to fire prone areas and they need to be given a classification as to whether they are defensible or not. The dwelling occupant should be advised of this rating and clear guidance given to them what to do for each level of FDR.
- The current BFMC system works well and should continue – achieving a balance between local input and professional guidance.
- The claims of some that ‘only locals’ know how to fight fires in each particular location is patently false given the success of the response to the recent season. However, the value of local knowledge of all local land managers should not be underestimated and more effort to be inclusive is needed.
- Hazard reduction efforts should be concentrated on where they can do the most good – adjacent to threatened the asset/property. This season has shown the diminished value in large scale remote hazard reduction on either public or private land for mitigating the effects of large bushfires on life, property of biodiversity. What counts is removing the fuel hazard near the threatened asset as well as the land owners preparation around and in their asset.
- There are varied levels of hazard reduction being undertaken by private and public land managers. There needs to be clear standards established for all and then reported against. Conforming to the standards should not be compulsory but there should be complete transparency as to where the bushfire risks are located across NSW regardless of tenure and what is being done to control these risks by ALL landholders.

1.3 Response to bushfires

- Serious consideration needs to be given to establishing a paid seasonal fire fighting resource to enhance efforts to quickly suppress as many fires as possible. While there will never be enough resources for every fire, a quick reaction resource, as is currently being deployed to Covid-19 hotspots, would mitigate the size and severity of many fires.
- Coordination of resources in an IMT is currently done by each different agency through multiple channels – there needs to be one resourcing application developed state wide which shows every resource in real time, for all agencies/resources. This can then be mapped to each fire and advice issued electronically to each resource in real time. The decisions on the deployment of resources are still made by humans, but the ‘tracking’ burden is moved to a more consistent reliable automatic system. This will help optimise the deployment of already scarce resources.
- The structures of IMTs have served the response to bushfires well over the years, however in this more complex world it is timely to review all roles and responsibilities in and IMT and to recast the way in which responses are managed. This should include a quality control aspect where throughout the response the IMT performance is monitored by peers and adjusted accordingly. While some would say that the resources are unavailable, a well thought through centralised model that tracks decisions and tests them against established standards could work well.
- Serious consideration should be given as to how a response would be coordinated if there was a pandemic similar to Covid-19 happening during a fire season like the one we just had. This should be a key outcome.

1.4 Any other matters

- While this inquiry will be valuable, each fire fighting agency needs to have a lessons learned culture established within it. This needs to be supported by a central body similar to the ‘Wildland Fire lessons learned Centre’ in the USA.
- The appropriate use of indigenous practices should be encouraged and supported by land managers, but the limitations of these practices also understood. Drastic changes to the pre-European landscape through settlement and dispossession of Aboriginal people, clearing and imposition of a new tenure system means that large scale pre-

European Aboriginal land management practices are no longer possible. However, land managers working directly with traditional owners at whatever scale is possible/feasible will yield partnerships that will benefit both culture and land.

- Claims made by various people that introducing large scale Aboriginal cultural fire management practices will address the fire risk posed by a warming climate and poor past land management practices are patently false and show a lack of understanding of the reality of the history of the NSW landscape and its division/development by non-Aboriginal people.
- Specific training to identify dangerous trees for all fire fighters. Currently trained on how to mark them, but no real training on how to identify dangerous trees.

Supporting documents or images
