



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

Your story

Our home is built on the Ashby ridge and is set upon 130 acres of natural bushland, with hundreds of acres surrounding us. The fire came from the Myall Creek fire.

Our home was built to the correct council standard (category 3 extreme fire zone), APZ was maintained and in the weeks leading up to the fire we prepared and followed our own fire plan. Lack of water was a big issue, even though we have a large dam and over 100,000 litres of stored tank water, being drought our supply was low.

The fire reached our home on the 26th November 2019. It crossed Mangrove creek and a containment line being cut in. Our plan was to leave to a safe place below our hill where other community members and emergency crews were gathered once the fire got close. I had communicated with locals for days before and had good reason to believe the fire would reach us.

The duty commander informed us that there would be no aerial support on that day due to the intensity of smoke and lack of visibility, this concerned us as we had been watching planes and helicopters for days prior fighting the surrounding area and dropping retardant, we were left to fight the fire on the ground, knowing our local Ashby fire brigade had broken down trucks and resources were stretched to capacity.

The fire went through our property in the afternoon so we returned, happy to see our house and shed standing. After about 30 minutes we could see huge orange smoke clouds and heard the roar of fire as the massive crowning fire came toward us from the north east, we ran for our lives and retreated back down the hill. Once we returned the second time, the entire place was on fire apart from our home and shed. There was a small fire truck (local members using the Jackadgery truck) and they were wonderful couple of guys who had been coming and going all day.

The fire raged through our place toward a more residential area where homes were saved by the efforts of the ground crews. We felt very lucky but have been extremely saddened by the complete annihilation of the wildlife and the old trees and vegetation in general. After 5 months I have seen only 1 small goanna and a couple of wallabies. This area was abundant with native life before the fire.

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

We believe there were a number of contributing factors:
Drought and harsh summer conditions for 2 years
The significant amount of fuel already on the ground due to a lack of previous hazard control measures plus the further dying off of ground cover and large native trees from drought.
Climate change is a factor which needs to be accepted, the climate is changing, it's not political, it's scientific.
The refusal by some in the local community to agree on hazard control based upon fear of harming wildlife or other differing ideology
The fear of some landholders that they may be in trouble for reducing risk to their property by either council or neighbours
The lack of local knowledge of some land holders not understanding the effects or intensity a fire could pose upon their own property, leading to lack of preparedness.

1.2 Preparation and planning

We had a 'Hot Spots' programme held on our property for the local community over 5 years ago in the hope that some owners would be educated toward allowing some hazard reduction to take place when conditions allowed, but there was resistance from some key property owners because they were concerned about the wildlife. (there are none left now..!)

In regard to planning and preparing for this fire we were very concerned to learn that the Ashby fire brigade trucks were mechanically dysfunctional and there was no money allocated for them to be fixed. Extremely frustrating and negligent when it was known weeks in advance that a major fire was potentially heading our way.

We feel that the building standards for fire zones in our council area is adequate and work when people maintain their homes

however Government may need to relax the ability to remove trees and widen Asset Protection Zones around houses, sheds, fence-lines, boundaries and also allow containment lines or fire breaks across properties such as ours, this might allow us to manage wildlife in sections and burn in areas to help wildlife and save trees.

For those property owners who live on 5 acre allotments nearby, who's property back onto vast acres of natural bush but have strict covenants placed on their property to not allow clearing, this needs reviewing because those homes were almost lost because the owners were only allowed to clear the front portion of their blocks leaving them vulnerable to the huge danger of vast bushland at their rear boundary. That was were the fire threat came from.

Connecting our property to the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] residential area at Ashby Heights is a fire track. That fire track allows vehicles to access a second way out, allow emergency vehicles entry at the rear and gives our neighbours an alternative means to escape also. This road collapsed some years ago but in the fire the structure has completely broken the bridge and is impassable. We feel this kind of infrastructure should be replaced and not be allowed to inhibit use.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The issuing of public warnings was effective, ABC had excellent coverage and the Fires Near Me App was a great tool for us to monitor the pace and direction of the fire.

In regard to coordination and deployment we became aware of some issues stemming from where direction and control was coming from. Because the Myall Creek fire started in the Richmond River region it was that area command who was making decisions and coordinating activity and allocating resources. It became evident that there was difficulties. We strongly believe that once the fire crossed council borders that our area fire brigade should have been given control. They are familiar with the area and the local community. We noticed that even down the the local brigade getting food, it had to come from out of area?? There was much discussion about the wait time for decisions and why the area command did not get handed over. Many thought it was about funding and money, if this is so, this is very disturbing.

In regard to resources, I have previously mentioned our local brigade were well and truly under equipped and under resourced. The aerial support was excellent and we think they worked well under huge pressure.

Great local efforts went into trying to bulldoze a containment line in for days but it didn't hold. There was some dissatisfaction where opportunities were lost to put in a back burn in the early hours of the morning and by the time command had made decisions it was late in the morning.

1.4 Any other matters

One of the local crews experienced the fire going over their truck, these men were new volunteers and quite elderly. It would be great if younger people could be encouraged to be involved to take the load off.

Preparation was key in protecting property. Some people seemed to have no idea of the dangers and tend to relax and allow vegetation to regrow. Council or the fire brigade could do a yearly visit or reminder to people of how to protect their assets. Reasonable clearing should be allowed.

Definitely need to be more proactive in the area of managing the bush so that animals and their habitat can return.

The most shocking aftereffects have been the loss of so many old and established trees that have fallen and continue to fall. Heartbreaking that we will never know the number of wildlife lost but we do know that it will never be the same.

Indigenous fire practices may well be something we should consider in our area.

It is also difficult to comprehend from a citizen point of view how under resourced our local brigades are.

We would like to know if in the lead-up to the last 2 fire seasons, knowing how bad it was going to be, did the government allocate extra funds to help combat the horrific conditions and potential of loss to our community?

It should also be explained, why did the government refuse to take the sound and experienced advice from the leading experts in the field of fire fighting? Why did they show such blatant disregard and arrogance?

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- IMG_6775.jpg
 - IMG_6925.JPG
 - IMG_7279.jpg
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