

I do not wish my submission to be made public and wish to remain anonymous, I was unsure if I even wanted to make a submission, but feel it is an important part of the recovery journey.

My family are beef cattle graziers in the Snowy Mountains area of NSW. We have approx 4000 acres and adjoin the Kosciusko National Park.

We lost close to 3500 acres of our property in the Adaminaby Complex fire on Saturday 4th January.

We also lost approx 20 kms of fencing and nearly all our our gateways. We were incredibly fortunate to only loose a couple of livestock and all our our buildings were spared.

The day of the fire was pretty horrendous, but the following 8 weeks of hand feeding 800 head of cattle and fencing repairs and continuing to put out the fire everyday, (which was still burning and smouldering in inaccessible areas, under the ground and in trees, along with continual flare ups, as weather conditions would deteriorate.) was exhausting and stressful.

But we got on and did what we needed to do to look after our farm and livestock.

The on going drought added extra pressure to this situation. The ability to source hay without going through charity channels was very tough. We learnt very quickly how charities and anything free are able to be abused by those who need it least. And were disgusted by some things we saw going on.

Yet despite all the environment stresses we were facing at the time, the most amount of grief we had was from our own local RFS. From misinformation and lies being spread, to total disregard to us as landholders and our family who had spent weeks preparing and containing the ongoing fire, using all our own gear and being self reliant, the final straw was physical and verbal abuse by a member of the local RFS, this resulted us contacting our local police and submitting a complaint to the NSW RFS. The complaint is yet to be acknowledged. The [REDACTED] of our local town brigade and his [REDACTED] were aware of this and were even fuelling the situation.

The toxic culture within the [REDACTED] RFS, has been long standing and during the height of a major bushfire in our area that burnt homes, large ares of private property and threatened towns, they were servicing their own self interest which caused immeasurable stress and grief to those affected most.

Bushfire are apart of our landscape and as landholders we are acutely aware of the risks and dangers that bushfires pose.

We do everything in our power to be self reliant and resourceful to protect our land, livestock and family, whilst being productive farmers.

These fire will happen again and again it will take countless volunteers, private landholders and professionals to all work together to keep us all safe. What we don't need is ineptitude and hero worship within our services who are meant to be there to firstly to serve.

I can only comment on our local experience and do not make these remarks as a general view of the wider RFS organisation.

Terms of Reference.

1.1 Causes and Contributing Factors

The ongoing drought and horrendous weather conditions are no doubt the cause of such catastrophic fires this summer. But it cannot go without saying that National Parks are grossly under managed. Even despite having had hazard reduction burns take place, the bush still burned so severely that in some areas it will not recover. Vegetation control and tree thinning, have to be apart of hazard reduction. The explosion of Eucalyptus regrowth within our National Parks is also a source of discontent. It has created a monoculture, that promotes a lack of bio diversity and soil health.

1.2 Preparation and Planning

We were fortunate to have all our own equipment and able hands. Including earthmoving gear, water tanks, high pressure hoses. We have over the years set ourselves up to be self reliant.

We would 100% stay and defend again, if we weren't not here on the day, we would've lost numerous livestock, all our machinery sheds, houses and so would've our neighbours.

Spending hours putting in containment lines at the direction of the RFS, was a complete waste of time and money. Containment lines only work if you back burn off them or put them out in the open to try and stop a grass fire. Containment lines around the edge of a national park where trees 20-30 metres tall and hang over boundary fences are practically useless.

We witnessed breakdowns in [REDACTED] RFS trucks and members not knowing how to siphon out of a water buoy, costing time and resources. For a local brigade that is constantly fundraising and receives significant donations, truck maintenance and proper training should be their highest priority.

1.3 Response to Bushfires

Considering the fire that burnt us out started in a National Park and continued to affect our property for weeks afterwards, we didn't see a single National Park employee on our property once or make contact with us, until we contacted them about the boundary fence.

I believe a more coordinated response from local brigades and local landholders is a must, this 'us and them' attitude has to stop.

1.4 Any other matters

I can only speak for the brigades who were present in our area. Most volunteers were professional and considerate when on our property communicating with us and offering help. Unfortunately the majority of our local brigade, with exception of a wonderful few, were uncommunicative, gave little respect or acknowledgment when entering or being on our property, entered our property without advising us, used a social media platform to spread discontent and misinformation, allowed its members to bully and intimidate members of the public and in general showed a complete lack of leadership.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]