

Your details

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Other

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](#).

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- Bush Fire Submission 17042020.docx

- The long period of below average rainfall and warm winters experienced in coastal NSW over the last few years created maximum soil moisture dryness conditions.
- The drier conditions limit the opportunity to conduct safe, effective and sustainable prescribed burning of any type.

Australian Government Special Climate Statement 73—extreme heat and fire weather in December 2019 and January 2020

- In 2019, large areas of Australia had their highest accumulated Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) for December. FFDI records date back to 1950.
- 2019 had the highest December accumulated FFDI for Australia as a whole, continuing the pattern seen in spring

Deployment of strike teams during Section 44 situations needs to be better co-ordinated.

“Strike team” suggests urgency but in practice out of area strike teams are slow lumbering columns. There are many reports of teams being based 2 hours drive from fire ground. The cost in time and money to get a group of Cat 1s and Cat 7 vehicles and crews out from motels or basecamps, fed, provisions for the day and then briefed and provided maps, means many crews were not on the fire ground before 10.00 am. It is then too hot to start backburns and suppression activities are at a disadvantage. Do to rising heat and wind speed.

The same applies when leaving in the evening to get back before the kitchen closes. Surely onsite catering and camping closer is more cost effective. Change over from night and day shifts were not always co-ordinated.

Away teams seldom have knowledge of the country and trails. A local bigrade member with a Cat 9 should be attached to each strike team to provide briefing and guidance with local knowledge. Reports of landholder stopping backburns as out of areas crews were on wrong property. Live Digital mapping screens connect with the Fire Control Centre to provide instant updates is needed.

Fridges in Tankers.

1. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.

- More staff are needed to help speed up the planning required to conduct prescribed burns effectively. This includes cultural, agricultural and ecological burns.
- Most Bush Fire Risk Management Plans in NSW are well beyond the due date for the 5 yearly reviews. Updating these plans and then implementing the treatments prescribed would go a long way in addressing the need for more effective risk management.
- When fires begin in remote locations from lightning strikes or other ignition sources during periods where the soil moisture is extremely dry such as in spring 2019 Rapid Aerial Response Teams (RART) and Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT) need to be on standby and be deployed to jump on these fires before they get large and uncontrollable.
- Consider legislation that requires the mandatory issue of year-round permits for all planned burns adjacent to public lands in bushfire prone areas.
- Appropriate resources, including trained paid staff, to be provided to properly manage the permit system to ensure that only those burns that can be carried out safely are issued fire permits.
- The necessary resources to ensure compliance with the Rural Fires Act 1997 be provided to fire authorities, with increased emphasis on follow up by the NSW Police on fires that escape from landholders' properties onto public and other adjoining lands.
- The Rural Fire Service increase resources to ensure landholders who light fires maintain an active presence at fires at all times until they are fully extinguished.
- Current resourcing to be reviewed to ensure that information on flora and fauna and their associated habitats, particularly specific locations and population numbers of threatened species and endangered ecological communities, are identified and mapped.
- Ensure that all available flora and fauna information is included as assets in BFRMPs and where possible, treatments identified to mitigate against fire. This may include implementing ecological prescribed burns in adjacent areas to protect environmental assets such as rainforest.
- Bush Fire Risk Management Plans to include guidelines for pre-fire weed management programs and post-fire restoration and rehabilitation standards to be developed and reviewed in consultation with all BFMC members and other relevant conservation and community stakeholders.
- Funding under Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* to be made available for post-fire recovery and restoration works administered by Bush Fire Management Committees.
- All Bush Fire Risk Management Plans are now out of date and need to be amended to include listing of Koala populations and other Environmental Assets and treatments and mitigation strategies assigned as a matter of urgency.

- The loss of hollow bearing trees and other ecological attributes means that all Threatened Species listings must now be reviewed.
- Cool burn techniques are needed to reduce fuel adjacent to assets and address cultural and ecological needs. The current system of relying on volunteers during the cooler months does not facilitate this. A volunteer who fights fires all summer cannot be expected to implement cool burns over many days in winter. In practice prescribed burns are prioritised for Asset Protection (or meeting hectare targets) and due to resourcing costs are carried out in one day. These tend to burn too hot and so do not fulfill all burn objectives. The result is there is less fuel on the ground, but thick regrowth of understory species occurs, and ecological and cultural values diminish. Teams of cool burn practitioners are needed to be able to do these burns over several days. This requires additional training for volunteers or funding of teams (especially Indigenous Rangers) who are contracted to undertake to burn at the end of each bushfire season. They could also be used for Remote Area firefighting using dryland firefighting techniques when water and tankers cannot be deployed. The teams could be joint funded by states and Commonwealth and deployed across borders when required.