

Submission by [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]
for the Inquiry into 'Black Summer' Bushfires in NSW 2019-20

Our community of Guerilla Bay have been impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires, but by fortune have not lost any life or property within our village. However our community/village has been surrounded by devastating extreme fire that has left us terrified that we will see the fire return and consume our community at the next bushfire season. Therefore we are looking for urgent action by government to allow for the reduction of risk, to be achieved, before the next bushfire season commences.

The Inquiry please consider, and report to the Premier on, the following matters.

1. The causes of, and factors contributing to, the frequency, intensity, timing and location of, bushfires in NSW in the 2019-20 bushfire season, including consideration of any role of weather, drought, climate change, fuel loads and human activity.

The long drought caused the vegetation and ground to be so dry, very low moisture/humidity has been a major factor of the 2019-20 bushfires. Together with the west, north/west winds and their strength drove the fire beyond control. Adding to this was the fuel load that has been allowed to acuminate over a number of decades.

Climate change may have a contributing factor, however we cannot rely upon climate change alone because the measures being adopted will take a long period of time to have effect, we cannot be at risk over such a period.

In relation to the above issues, it has been long recognised by the community at large that, of all the factors covered above we can only control the amount of fuel load on the ground.

Bushfires need, Oxygen + fuel + ignition, for them to occur. As a community we cannot control, the wind, Climate, moisture/humidity, lightening strikes, we can only exercise control over the fuel load, upon the ground and within the forest. The more fuel existing is a direct cause of the extreme level of a fire.

2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.

The intensity of the bushfires over the 2019-20 period were so intense, flames over 20 meters high and over 1200C temperatures, with high fuel loads.

The fuel loads are direct cause of these extremes and the cause of large amounts of embers, which spread the fire with speed and intensity.

To try and change building standards so as to cope with such conditions are not possible and just set up the community for further failure in the future. The community as a whole are aware of this.

The need to reduce fuel load is being delayed by the current requirements to obtain permissions to burn. We urgently need for the parliament to change Legislation. The Office of Environment and Heritage, and or other public departments, should not be involved.

The community urgently need (within April/May this year) for the permission to burn, be given by the local bushfire brigade, for hazard reduction. This is because fuel loads in some areas remain high, not all of the danger areas have been burnt and need to have hazard reduction carried out before the next bushfire season (August this year).

The local bushfire brigade's have the local knowledge of where and timing of a burn, they will be supervising a burn, may in fact make use as a training day.

After hazard reduction, the indigenous practices should be used to undertake cultural burns. These burns are smaller and cooler than hazard reduction so permission to these burns should rest with the local land council's, again because these people have the local knowledge. These burns can be used as a maintenance practice.

The cost of these burns need to be funded by government. Funding would be cost effective, when compared to the damage/cost to life, property, flora and fauna during the 2019-20 bushfire season.

3. Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including:
 - immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings
 - resourcing, coordination and deployment
 - equipment and communication systems.

The answers to the above points already exist. They have been recommendations from a number of inquiries from the past. The problem has been these recommendations have not been implemented.

They need to be implemented at once and the authority, be handed to local bushfire brigade/land councils. All the previous reports required increased hazard reduction. These recommendations have not previously been implemented. The community are aware of this and see the recent fires as being caused by government lack of action and 'spin'. These practices by government are not acceptable.

4. Any other matters that the inquiry deems appropriate in relation to bushfires.

And to make recommendations arising from the Inquiry as considered appropriate, including on:

NSW Rural Fire Service, (RFS) publishes 'Planning For Bush fire Protection' November 2019 edition. Included on page 106 is information regarding Asset Protection Zones (Appendix 4) and on page 108 includes Figure A4.1, which illustrates various Asset Protection Zones (APZ)

Illustrated building envelope or asset, inner protection area, outer protection area then bushland. RFS publishes The [10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice](#).

This code illustrates a Inner APZ of 10 metres and outer APZ of 50 metres.

I ask that all Highways and main roads have a inner APZ of 50 metres and a further outer APZ of 30 metres, for each side of the roadway, where land is adjacent to these highways.

This will achieve APZ of 50 plus 30 metres = 80 meters each side of the roadway, achieving 160 meters fire break to contain any fire and keep the highway open. I refer to the Princes Highway being closed for many weeks, trapping holiday makers, food, fuel and other supplies being unable to be delivered to most of the south coast. This also applied to the Kings Highway from Batemans Bay to Canberra. Such closures are not acceptable.

Further electricity lines and substations need the same APZ. The loss of electricity on the south coast shut down petrol pumps, sewerage systems, supermarkets, phone and internet communications.

Phone towers also need APZ applied to them, possibly 80-100 metres around them. They are located at the ridge lines, so fires just rush up and consume these structures. The result includes no emergency messages to the community, communications between RFS, epos unavailable etc. All of these things were a major problem for the south coast this year. Even now these services have only been repaired, restoration to full service has not been undertaken. The loss of all these services plunges the area into complete shutdown, this is not acceptable and not necessary.

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

My understanding from the 2019-20 fire season, is if a map of the fires are overlaid upon a map of the National, parks, forestry land and reserves, what will show is all the major extreme fires originated from these public lands. That would indicate to us as a community that these land holders are not managing the land they hold. This situation must change. All land holders must manage their lands so as to not put neighbouring lands at risk.

Private landholder need to be reminded of their responsibility to manage their land so as to reduce the risk of fire and not be a threat to their neighbours land. There are many examples from last fire season, but I will not go into them here.

National Parks, State forest and council owned land (reserves etc) also need to be managed so as to not put adjoining land at risk. This is very important, at present this type of risk is being ignored. The belief is that residence insurance and new building regulations will take care of this situation. Regularity authorities exhibit a belief they do not need to act. This is unacceptable and needs to change urgently.

We the community require proper, practicable and complete recommendations and further need to be implemented before next bushfire season. This we rest with the commission.