

## Your details

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## Submission details

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### I am making this submission as

A primary producer

### 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

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### Your story

I live in Adelong but my husband, son and I farm at [REDACTED] at Yaven Creek in the south west slopes of NSW. We run a cattle and sheep property producing food and fibre as do most producers in the region. Our enterprise is self-supporting. We do not have off farm income. The Dunns Road fire ignited approximately 15 kilometres from our property. We actively attended the fire for the duration in our district where eventually we lost assets and acres as well as stock. It has had a great impact on our lives in the short and long term. The fire impacts on a physical and emotional level effecting myself and my family in different ways. Our property was threatened and our loses were experienced on the Saturday 4th January and again on Friday 10th January 2020.

Dunns Road fire was started by lightning strike in Hume Forests pine plantation on 28/12/2019. We received an alert at 1pm on our local brigades group chat on what's app. My partner attended in one of the first RFS tankers responding to the call. The fire was well alight and crowning in the pines. It quickly became clear that the fire was out of control in the pine. The early response tankers had to retreat and were then tasked to property protection, as the pine ran closely to private properties. The fire burnt to these properties and spotted on to others.

My partner, son and I continued to fight the fires for 16 days – for most of that time we were attending blazes in our own private slip on firefighting unit. The fire was burning in several directions due to wind and weather changes. We spent time patrolling and monitoring as the fire threatened our property from different directions during this time. On the 4th January 2020 we patrolled on the southern end in the morning. But as the weather conditions changed it became evident that the fire front was going to threaten our property from the north western direction – spotting from the Ellerslie Nature Reserve. Our property was threatened and burnt in the evening of the 4th of January. We sought information from locals as we were unable to get relevant information from elsewhere. We travelled up to neighbouring properties on the Snowy Mountains Highway. They had tanker back up and as the fire burnt to these properties we proceeded back to our home blocks to defend our assets. My partner, son and I with the assistance of [REDACTED] our neighbour attempted to defend our property with only private resources such as slip on units. We continued to discover however, that tankers were assigned to property protection further from the fire front than ours. How does this make sense? How does the RFS make an assessment on where tankers should property protect? Effectively we saved half of our farm. We lost our shearing shed with numerous bales of wool, a hay shed full of fodder to feed stock to the seasonal break and 300 acres of prime grazing country. We lost 40 head of cattle including steers and breeding stock (3 killed immediately during fire, 13 had to be destroyed post fire, 26 sent to abattoir post fire).

We fought the fire for 16 days and helped many others in the area over the duration of the fire event. Yet we feel that the local resources were not only under resourced by were not used effectively either. Importantly we witnessed many occasions where local knowledge and landscape/firefighting knowledge was not used in fact it was openly discarded for plans dictated from remote locations off site. Back burns were planned that were initiated by those off site which were unrealistic and effectively spreading fires in many directions.

From 28th December 2019 – we patrolled properties from Ellerslie to Yaven Bridge including private enterprise such as Hume Forests, National Parks, State Forest plantations. These private industries and government departments had little if any resources or plans in place to defend their own properties let alone ours and neighbours shared boundaries. There were times when we called state forestry for assistance on their land. They never acknowledged the need to attend the fires. We saw many communication errors that could, but luckily didn't result in the loss of life. Backburns were lit by different brigades protecting their own patch but threatening and not even alerting our brigades as to what they were doing. In hot firefighting conditions, some of these burns were lit and then left with little or no management. Some were left with no management or any one in attendance resulting in frantic calls to 000 to get people back in attendance. There were two particular back burns that jumped the lines near a property owned by the Quilty family. These threatened our blocks several times.

The weather forecast for Saturday 4th January was exceptionally bad. It had been forecast for days prior to being bad with unfavourable winds yet RFS and National Parks at the Ellerslie Nature Reserve let the northern fire front, which eventually burnt us, burn unattended for days prior to action. IF the fire front had been attended to more quickly it would have stopped excessive destruction in our area.

Post fire we have had little financial assistance. We live in town but our livelihood is on farm but we received no financial assistance because of this. Accessing funding takes time and is stressful and there was little assistance available for people in our situation. We were unable to get rates relief from council through Service NSW – nobody seemed to know what to do! These things add so much stress to people that are striving to find some sort of normality.

We now find ourselves in a situation whereby assistance post fire is limited. We lost assets which will eventually be rebuilt. We feel a sense of loss of trust in the departments that are meant to assist us including the RFS of which we are active members. How do we proceed to educate and go forward to create positive change? The RFS needs to stop excessive back burning and start using local knowledge to strategically plan fire response. The private and state forestry need to have a plan in place with fire fighting equipment on hand. They need to monitor lightning strikes, control their weed loads and have buffer zones between their forests and farmland. They also need to have personnel in place trained to fight fires. As landholders we had some equipment and strategies in place to look after our land. Others also need to be responsible.

I am certain that the fire could have been controlled in the first couple of days if more aerial bombing had been used. The aerial resources should have been used more aggressively while visibility was clear. I have heard reports that pilots were sitting in Tumut and Albury airports waiting to be tasked to the fire front but were not called upon, for reasons unknown? I am sure the devastation of the Dunn's Road Fire could have been kept to a minimum if these resources had been used.

## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

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

### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

#### 1.1 – Causes & Contributing Factors:

Hume forests had no fire plan or resources to fight the fire – only one canter truck with 1000's of acres of plantations

National Parks had too much fuel, no weed management.

There are no borders or buffer zone between parks, plantations and private property.

### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

#### 1.2 – Preparation and Planning:

As private property owners we put plans in place to protect our property including putting stock in yards or safe paddocks. Grader lines around infrastructure. Vehicles x3 with pumps and slip on units. Plan to stay together.

Sprinklers around houses/infrastructure.

- Government departments need to have planning in place.

### **1.3 Response to bushfires**

#### 1.3 – Response to Bushfires

Response needs to be fast and swift to put out fires before they get to big. Not to let them burn and then try to control even in parks.

### **1.4 Any other matters**

- – Any other matters ; Our local bushfire brigade which consists of a CAT1, CAT7 were not present when the fire approached us or our neighbours.

- RFS had tankers at houses before us on the road but they didn't follow the fire up the creek to help us? Why not?

- A major fire front that destroyed many places before us was stopped by two utes with slip on units and four people (two men, 1 woman and a ■ year old boy).

1.4 RFS and National Parks should use local knowledge of properties to make decisions about:

- fire fighting.

### **Supporting documents or images**

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