

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

Life at the end of December and all through January in Fishermans Paradise was a scary experience. We didn't lose any houses in our village, but that was due to residents fighting hard and remaining vigilant over this time. Twice we suddenly received 'too late to leave' messages - possibly there were more but from the afternoon of Dec 31st through to Mid-Jan we had no phone or wifi connection. It was a time of reliance on sight (flames, smoke and helicopters), smell and wind direction to judge how close the fires were. Some days from the 2nd story of our house we could see flames all around the village. Trees in the the wetlands directly across from our property kept flaring up for weeks. When we weren't in immediate danger, smoke was an issue and many in the village (including my husband) now have residual breathing issues. A vivid memory of New Years Eve was over the hours we were fighting fires at our property and surrounding houses and bush, was every so often, the village fire truck driving by (the

volunteers looking exhausted), and I'd think 'at last, we have some help' but they'd slow down and yell 'keep going, you're doing a great job' before taking off to manage other local locations that were burning.

We developed 'procedures' (refined over time) to help manage the risk, learning e.g through end of December/most of January we (my husband and I) never both slept at the same time - one us on watch while the other slept at night, we made sure to have a good breakfast on high fire risk days as there may not be time to eat after the winds got up, buckets of water around the house and the bathtub filled at all times in case we lost water again, a 'fire fighting' table set up in our living room with everything we had on hand in one place etc. This was a long period of time to be living with an extreme risk, plus have no income (we have a tourism business) over this time.

It has been heartbreaking to see the loss of bush and wildlife. The images of dead and injured wildlife stay with me (e.g a burnt dead kangaroo caught in a fence on Fishermans Paradise Road, injured distressed kangaroos coming into the village for food - they had to be put down).

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

1. Currawan fire wasn't controlled early enough.
2. Lack of resources were a contributing factor - lack of large water-bombing aircraft, lack of fire trucks and fire-fighters on the ground, lack of water-bombing helicopters etc
3. Government failure to react to climate change
4. Minimal fuel-load reduction undertaken in years prior.
5. Lack of understanding/respect for Aboriginal Land Management Practices and not following these procedures.
6. A fire break across the highway near our village got out of control on NYE, and this directly impacted our village and surrounding areas.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Planning - there is no safer place designation for our village. The current 'safer place' designation is Ulladulla - 23km away. We were actually lucky we got the 'too late leave' notification as that meant we were on hand on protect our property and that of our neighbours. We would have lost houses (possibly our own included) had we not been here to protect them. It was really scary though not having anywhere safe reachable to 'take shelter as fire approaches'. Coastal villages have the beach but we didn't even have a local hall or community centre. This lack of a 'local gathering place' also was/is an issue during recovery (albeit fires still burning) where a residents veranda was used for food/water distribution, and later a marquee had to be brought in to hold a Recovery Meeting in early March.

Reliance on volunteer fighters in this area is also an issue. Many volunteers lost their own properties while fighting elsewhere. Government funded (State or Federal) fire fighting teams (that can manage fuel loads outside of bush fire season) need to be established and well-funded.

Climate change - the government ignoring science and not planning for the increased risk of bushfires that were forecast for South Coast NSW is the underlying cause of the terrible fires in our area.

1.3 Response to bushfires

1. While Fires Near Me was an excellent resource at times, there are many improvements needed. It was often out of date, and not all local burning areas showed on the map. For example the burnt bush and wetlands across the

road from our house (and along the north side of Conjola Creek) never showed on the app. Also, nearer the end of January a peat fire flared up across the road from Fishermans Paradise requiring multiple appliances and water bombing helicopters to get it under control - this didn't come up on the app either.

2. Lack of communication - Like the government, mobile providers such as TELSTRA need to plan for bushfire response to ensure that as many people as possible retain communication. Fires Near Me and warning systems are only good if there is mobile phone service.

3. Once we lost power, houses with water not on mains had no water supply. There is compliance required for properties near bush to have the tanks accessible for fire-fighters. In the case of our neighbours they had to supply details to the RFS of their water system. We had to use our hoses joined together feeding off our taps and also wheel rubbish bins filled with water to fight fires across the road around their place. If we'd been able to access their water tank, the threat would have been much easier to manage. Planning compliance for off the main water supplies needs to reflect that there may not be RFS support available.

4. LOSS OF WATER - although water pressure dropped on NYE, we were lucky to maintain supply (unlike Conjola Park). It was frightening though when we lost water supply for a couple of days after that. Alternative planning for this scenario would save properties and lives.

5. As appreciative as we are of the FRS, there was not enough RFS/Fire Fighting support (e.g. army called have been called in earlier to assist) - we all knew the fire was coming/was likely to come this way. The response was too little, too late.

6. Locals were extraordinary - many of us fought bravely, most of us with no prior experience and limited resources.

1.4 Any other matters

Electricity: Many wooden power poles were burnt in our area, and we no power Dec 31st - Jan 8th, when a generator was supplied for our village. It seems crazy that these poles are being replaced with more wooden poles, instead of utilising fire-resistant technology.

ROOF SPRINKLER SYSTEMS: Many properties in the surrounding area were saved by the use of roof sprinklers. Roof sprinkler systems are expensive, however if these were subsidised for those on lower incomes, there would have been less loss of property, and less risk of injury (e.g. on Jan 4th while on fire watch from our house, I looked out the window to see an 80+ year old neighbour on his roof of a 2-story property. Another neighbour volunteered to do that for him after that and there were no accidents but the risk of injury is real). Also from a mental health perspective, roof sprinkler systems on all houses would mean much less anxiety and ability focus efforts on other parts of the property or surrounds.

4. Training and resources available (e.g. subsidies for fire-fighting equipment) for property owners. Not just rural, but also for village properties too.

5. Sub-division development - planning consent does not take into account adequate bush-fire planning for small villages like ours. (e.g. There is a sub-division planned for Fishermans Paradise on land that the fire ripped through on December 31st). There should be no additional subdivisions allowed until villages like ours have a safer place designation and adequate fire-fighting resources and plans.

6. One road in/out - unlike many other villages on the South Coast, there is an existing plan that hasn't been implemented for an alternative road into/out of to Fishermans Paradise. While it probably wouldn't have helped the situation on NYE when there were fires in all directions, an alternative access/exit point may save lives and properties in the future.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- IMG_1968.JPG
- IMG_0851.JPG

- IMG_2003.JPG



