



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

I moved to this address 9/2018. It is a rural residential block with approximately 1 relatively cleared acre & 2 of bush. I had spent 12 months clearing overgrown vegetation & abundant leaf litter to reduce the risk of fire especially around my house, sheds, internal access road & along road frontage
There had been fires in the area for months & I had continued this pursuit. 'No burn' periods limited disposal as well as green bin pick up fortnightly.
The RFS app helped monitor fires in the area & was initially invaluable
The Hillville fire threatened from 6/11/19. My house was as prepared as it could be with clear gutters, area watered etc. I left my property on the morning of 8/11/19 & the fire was about 8kms away. Within hours, evacuation order was issued & I was unable to return to get pet due to fires between my home & Forster. I stayed there overnight, monitoring via RFS app & believed I had lost my home. I sat at the beach at Forster thinking

the world was ending- all I could see was fire & smoke
Attempts to return home were futile as all roads were closed
when I tried to get there . The not knowing & not being able to
return was overwhelming. Not knowing if my pet was safe
devastating. Eventually some neighbours had returned via a fire
trail & I learnt my house & pet were still there. I also returned via
a fire trail.

There are no words or emotions to describe what had happened
to our area. The absolute devastation - homes lost, the
environment lost, wildlife dead & injured, sheds, gardens etc
gone...just BLACK & smouldering & still on fire. It was evident it
was an extremely HOT fire.

I was lucky & had a home. I lost a shed, fencing, bushland & fire
had reached to within 1m of my home. I learnt later that a brigade
had been at mt home. Lucky.

My neighbours & I then spent the next 4 days & nights putting out
fires. We hardly slept & had no power. If we had not been here,
there would definitely have been more loss. The threat continued
from surrounding areas that continued to flare. Roads would
open & then suddenly be closed again. We were still putting out
fires intermittently until Xmas day, seven weeks after the initial
assault.

I had previously lived on a farm in the area for twenty years &
have seen multiple bushfires, drought, floods. I have also had
two husbands pass away. This experience was THE WORST of
my life. It is still very difficult to write this & I have put it off &
missed two earlier deadlines as it was too confronting, stressful,
painful etc. Apologies as I have probably not put things clearly
against TOR.

The focus went quickly from this area & further north as the fires
intensified down south. Again, absolute devastation & lost lives.
Unfortunately the focus seems to have remained down south &
neglect of this tragedy has been exacerbated by Covid-19

We were also fortunate to get rain 1/2020 & this has helped the
recovery. Unfortunately, the heat of the fire has killed most of the
understory so fire remains a threat due to this fuel. Weeds are
also dominating so land management is vital

On a positive note, it cemented the generosity & resilience of our
community - helping each other out was the only way I couldve
stayed

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

Personally I believe climate change is creating the conditions we
are facing. Weather conditions & drought meant fuel loads were
highly combustible. Inability to burn & fortnightly green bin limited
removal of combustibles also.

Many deny climate change & rather than argue this point, we
need to plan for the conditions we're currently facing & strategise
to overcome them

Human activity or non-activity/complacency etc definitely contributed to this disaster. When clearing leaf litter along the road side before this event I told a neighbour I was trying to make a fire break. The reply was "You're pretty right here. I've been here since 1986 & its never been a problem". I heard warning bells!!!! & continued on my quest!! No fire in this area for over 33 years meant it was a disaster waiting to happen in my view.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Council regulation re clearing around homes- 10m for tees, 50m for undergrowth. Needs to be increased & include all property infrastructure i.e. house, sheds, tanks, fences. CFA guideline for replanting suggests 1.5x tree height from house. Need to be able to CLEAR this same area.

Roads, fire trails, communication towers & power lines need to have at minimum, this same rule applied. Falling trees on power lines created some fires. Falling trees also made many roads inaccessible. MANY places have one way in & out. Danger for residents, emergency services etc.

Many years ago, farmers cleared fire breaks each year from boundary to opposing boundary on other side of the road. This gave much safer access in event of fire & acted as fire break

Fire hydrants have not been maintained & this quite possibly led to the loss of a home on my street. Did not know it was there till next day. Have since joined RFS & they have said this has long been an issue. No markers present, hydrant overgrown or full of dirt etc. Needs to be regularly maintained & ensure signage/markers clear & in place

Sprinkler systems on homes would be beneficial

1.3 Response to bushfires

Communication after fires intermittent & unreliable. Towers impacted some I believe by retardant (?). Clearing to ensure they remain safe & active is vital

RFS app not always updated in a timely manner. I assume due to the magnitude of the fires.

Not knowing if house there or not, including pets & stock was VERY DIFFICULT. Aware that RFS 'stocktake' as they were reporting numbers of homes & sheds lost/saved. Perhaps this could be included on the app for actual addresses impacted

No power for 4-12 days in immediate area. If no generator then no access to phones/internet/radio

Fuel was unavailable as power unavailable or roads inaccessible. Some also needed for pumps to access water. Obviously fire trucks etc also needed access. Portable supplies via truck ???

1.4 Any other matters

Absolute admiration for RFS, Forestry, Police, emergency services & those supporting them. Disappointed in government's initial response. Not enough resources to cope. Needed federal involvement & deployment of Armed Forces/reserves immediately due to the magnitude of this event

Indigenous practices & training MUST be implemented for future land management. There must be MORE COOL BURNS allowing wildlife to escape & not destroy our environment. We cannot allow this to EVER happen again. We MUST listen to those who predicted & warned of this event - previous Fire Commissioners etc. We must dedicate the resources to preventative measures & back it up with needed resources - in the air & on the ground.

Work for the dole schemes can help with land management practices. I have seen them work in the past

Having town water was saving factor for my immediate area & am grateful for that advantage. Council made determination re water bills so could only claim rebate if bill increased by over \$200. Yet opened hydrants to those on tank water at NO COST. Inconsistent & unfair practice. Many then financially disadvantaged. Water was needed for an extended period not just one night!! I wrote to Council about this twice & received no reply

Temporary housing needs to be made available QUICKLY following an event such as this. Council did respond & allow unregistered caravans on site for those who lost homes but this was delayed and disadvantaged many in the interim.

Admiration for power company. Went above & beyond to restore power. My street at approx 9pm on 11/11/19. Unfortunately technician then had to travel to Raymond Terrace for next job. Inefficiencies & danger for employees

Media invasive (asking for interviews when trying to extinguish fires) & Media helicopter landing at neighbours property actually reignited a fire in my yard Fortunately I arrived & was able to extinguish (10/11/19) They filmed a neighbour watching his house burn down. Seriously??!!

Local volunteer organisations filled the immediate gaps in this area. People were so generous with their time & donation of items-everything from clothing, food to pet supplies. The issue then became that there was so much & for those who lost houses, nowhere for them to put all the items that will be needed to rebuild their lives-cant fit much in a tent. Hopefully it can be accessed via other organisations when needed.

Supporting documents or images
