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## Your details

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

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**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public**

I would like this submission to remain anonymous

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

I am attaching my personal submission written after the fires. As it is now 4 months since we were impacted I am surprised at the long term recovery which it has taken for both my husband and I. As we fought the fire & nearly lost our house, we naively thought that we had achieved a result and all would be OK. We did not expect the pain and the weird feelings after the fires which we experienced. This we gather was the adrenalin in our bodies and that has only decreased for me with massage and some body treatments also counselling sessions. I had very bad posture & bent over walking, we both had pain and difficulty getting up after sitting down even for 10 minutes. I might add we are both very fit (even though over 70) !! We also had to burn off the rubbish accumulated from clearing around our house and just the thought of that last weekend, made me feel sick and become tense even though I knew my husband had all prepared properly.

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## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

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### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

The fire came from Dignams Creek on 23.01.20 and apparently took 20 minutes to cross the Princes Hwy and arrive at our property. There was no news on Fires Near Us, our only news of the impending fire was from our family in Byron Bay who were looking at their apps. The forecast on 23rd January, 2020 gave no indication of the severity of the wind which started about 90kph and of course accelerated with the arrival of the fire. We did not know which direction it would actually come from until it arrived at our property. We did not see the flames other than when the fire first arrived 300 metres away and we were not terrified because I guess we had no time to be.

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

My husband bought a stick rake and had been raking our small hill to the west of our house since winter, 2019. There was hardly anything on the ground for the fire to really burn all around our house other than the bush to the south and east. Even so the grass on the northern side caught fire. Another plus was a cleared area on west side of house for playing boule which was gravelled & surrounded by sleepers, which burnt for days but which stopped progress of fire to the house. We had also pruned and cut back every shrub & tree in close proximity which we could reach. The house has had a sprinkler system on the roof for over 10 years plus curtain sprinklers under the eaves. Elevated sprinklers on the western side of the house both for watering & fire protection. My husband, [REDACTED] had also put elevated sprinklers on the eastern side of the house in late December.

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### 1.3 Response to bushfires

I covered that above, re the pain in our bodies, forgot to mention the tiredness and lack of interest in doing anything other than being in the house. I am a gardener and did not even venture into the garden for 6 weeks afterwards. I was not interested in doing the housework, cooking or handling anything other than family matters and paperwork for the insurance company. Why is the backup for fire fighting so pathetic in this country.? In our area there were only 36 people capable of defending 3 to 4 towns, including Cobargo and the hardware & trucks fell far short of what was needed. It is time rural areas received the funding and attention they need and deserve. My daughter and grand daughter came down from Byron Bay & even though I didn't think we needed help, we really did and it was wonderful.

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### 1.4 Any other matters

We believe that the only thing that saved our house other than us being here were the sprinklers on the roof and also in the garden surrounding the house. Also the fact that the beams in our roof were hardwood and when the embers strike came, we were able to save the house.

It should be mandatory to have a similar system in areas where homes are threatened and the cost of installing this should be offset against any insurance paid by the home owners. The cost & loss of property could be cut down enormously and the taxing of both human and financial resources reduced if these steps were taken.

This also has to be encouraged by home owners keeping & having sufficient water backup to fight a fire, we used 60000. litres. and this storage needs to be encouraged and offset by reducing insurance premiums.

Foliage in all areas needs to be minimised both in the cities,

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towns & countryside properties. I realise this is an individual matter but if home owners do not comply, they should not expect their properties to be saved and protected.

## Supporting documents or images

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### Attach files

- Summer of 19 to 20.docx
  - Tractoron BouleCourt.jpg
  - BurntRoof&HeatCam.jpg
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## THE SUMMER OF 2019 TO 2020

### PERIOD LEADING UP TO SUMMER IE SEPT TO DECEMBER.

Having lived in the north of NSW in the country for many years, I took particular notice of the early fire warnings creeping down the coast from Queensland. Australia has been in a declared drought situation for many months and in fact years so the expectation of fire has been high in areas from the outback to the coast.

Fires started happening even in the winter of 2019 and there were dire warnings from the Fire Departments in all States that the summer could be disastrous and disastrous it was for thousands of people – the deaths, the losses of stock, pasture & farming lands, homes, livelihoods, businesses and scenery became all too real up until February 2020. The rains came in ??? and people started to relax with only relaxed in falls of rain mostly in February 2020. Jan ?? and then to their dismay there were flood!!

We had had a very peaceful NYE with a lovely bunch of family and friends staying in our home, when the alarm came through about 4.30AM to evacuate towards Bermagui, only 7kms away but along 2km of our bush access. We had been packing escape bags that afternoon as there were warnings of fires which could eventuate in our area – but not really believing that they would or could as they were over 30kms away.

INSERT NYE AT [REDACTED] also the Sports Pavilion with its stock of goods and the Surf Club.

Distance means nothing when a fire is fanned by a westerly wind over drought stricken fields and bush and when one fire meets another as happened to virtually destroy the small historic town of Cobargo in the early hours of first of January 2020. Cobargo is approximately 10kms away from us as the crow flies and has been a source of much fun with friends, a small shop and business for us in the past and to see its timber streetscape & shops reduced to just rubble & chimney stacks was heartbreaking for all concerned. It was more heartbreaking to hear of the loss of life concerned with this small closeknit village which will take years to recover from its ordeal.

Now 2 months later, the fields around are as green as any synonym can describe but the lives of the people in Cobargo will not be the same for many years. The rubble in the main street has still guard fencing around the burnt sites and the assistance the town has received has been wonderful. Their Sports field is still a 'tent & vehicle city' for Blaze Aid and blab la where locals can enrol to join the residents waiting for assistance to build boundary fences and other necessary restraints for stock. Many residents cannot afford insurance for boundary fencing and so Blaze Aid is fantastic in providing the labour and even the materials if the farmer cannot afford to buy them.

The Show Ground has been a fantastic refuge for those who lost their homes and has only just stopped providing 3 meals a day for all those in need. Accommodation was provided around the town and at the Show Ground for many who lost everything and in the early days, there was Counselling available night and day. Counselling also occurred in the telling of the tales of woe and heroism amongst everyone and it helped heal the shock of looking out every day on burnt landscapes and the once built devastation in the area.

Mention has not been made of the weather in depth. It was obviously hot and mostly incredibly windy during the actual fires but November and December heralded the arrival of dust driven in by the westerly winds – this settled everywhere as did the ash after the fires!! Then came the smoke – like a pea soup fog for days on end and it haunted the landscape until the winds arrived. Smoke was blown from the fires in the west as far away as Canberra and smoke arrived from the fires further north from the burning of the bush, houses and towns south of Sydney as it progressed towards us all with the march of the fires.

Our actual day of reckoning was 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2020 after we had been in Bermagui in the morning and returned home for lunch about 12 midday. The Byron Bay branch of the family had informed us there was a fire not far away in Rileys Road, about 2km from us. We busied ourselves, not stressing out but preparing our clothing, the hoses and ourselves in case the fire appeared. We did not have a warning in time, we were fighting the fire to save our house by the time the first warning came in at 2.33pm thus we did not hear it. We received more advice from the family and our next door neighbour who arrived by ute and said to get out to us and to [REDACTED] who lives on our property.

Two hours of fighting fire during which time we did not even stop to take in the enormity of what was happening. I am so glad we did not look up at the trees where the fire was burning more than 20 feet or metres above the tallest of them

Our neighbours gave us this info and I know when they & the fire trucks arrived

About 4pm they were concerned that we would not be alive and the house would not be standing as in a group they had watched this fast moving catastrophe envelope our farm and only arrived when it was safe to approach.

It was wonderful to have such enthusiastic help as the fires were still burning around three sides of the house and then nearly the worst event happened as [REDACTED] saw smoke billowing from the roof outside and it had fill the inside of the house !! [REDACTED] screamed at me to bring the fire hose, and to run, at which instruction, I became almost stationary with the heavy hose in my hand and probably exhaustion after 2 hrs of hosing. Fortunately [REDACTED] took over and threw it on the verandah as though it was a piece of string. [REDACTED] marched into our lovely 'furnished living room' with the fire hose squirting everywhere but especially at the 30high ceiling which was by then ablaze. Despite our entreaties to save the TV it did not come off well and we saved the house instead of the TV and the Sound Bar!!

I was glad of a rest and sat to watch in case the fire burnt down the beam. After about half an hour, I thought it was safe and went outside for 10 minutes or so and when I returned the fire had crept another 10 metres or so down the beam. We realise now that if we had not built all the roof and supports in hardwood, we would have lost the house in the first minutes of the smoke appearing. The internal roof is able to be fixed but will be complicated to say the least and am looking forward to the day when the pieces of burnt timber stop falling from the ceiling.

All the firies spent the next hour or so putting out the trees and spots around the house and in the forest to the south. The carefully cut and stacked wood pile was left to burn as no one had enough water to put it out – all that work of lugging and cutting timber last spring has to be done again!! Even the water in the pool was on its last foot or so and Tony has worked out since that we used over 60,000 litres putting the fire out around the house and the garden to save the house. Crazy things survived like our beloved camping Slide on in amongst the trees burning virtually on top of it and not even scorching its rough aluminium surface.

The tractor parked in the middle of the Boule court – another saving grace for our house with its dry pebbled surface even though the sleepers surrounding it were still burning the next morning in spite of my endeavours to extinguish it.

The follow up to our fire was incredible as another fire truck arrived with 2 guys and a heat seeking camera. Unfortunately they climbed the stairs to get

closer to the still warm roof beams and the camera showed that they were still at 27 to 30 degrees. So back came the fire hose and more water until the beams were showing 20 degrees and the floor, the sofa and the rugs were well saturated.

After those guys left, [REDACTED], the local Fire Captain arrived to make sure we were OK and that the fires were nearly out and under control. As a personal friend, it was great to see him and it enabled [REDACTED] to relax a bit knowing that [REDACTED] was around in case there was more trouble.

Poor [REDACTED] by 3am we had to call 000 as the large fire down the hill had got out of control and a tree had nearly fallen on [REDACTED] when he went to put it out. [REDACTED] appeared with the long fire hose and made sure the fire was not going to trouble anyone for the rest of the night.

The sound of trees falling was the next disturbing event as they crashed to the forest floor amid a resounding bang and often a trembling of the earth surrounding them. This went on for over a week and was a daily evening happening even after [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] arrived the following Monday

## THE AFTERMATH

It has been weird to say the least. Gatherings of friends and acquaintances have taken place all over our deserted little town with everyone trying not to talk about the fires. But the talk happens all the time, it must be therapeutic for most of us as we all share 'our different stories' and everyone listens and takes it on board – hopefully to learn & brace themselves in case there is ever another time.

Counselling has been available either through Relationships Australia and the local Medical Centre or with a retired Counsellor who made himself at what he called The Listening Post on the road into Bermagui. He was very popular and much appreciated.





