



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 am a volunteer with the Tyringham RFS and we had fire and smoke in this area from 30 August 2019 from the Bee Nest Fire. The smoke was so thick on 3 September had a callout to Marengo to investigate the fire. It was still in the Guy Fawkes Gorge. On 6th September I spent all morning ringing NPWS, Ulmarra and Glen Innes Fire control to find out details of weather conditions and expected wind directions to find out when and where the fire was likely to come out of the gorge, only to be fobbed off and told if i was worried to leave early. We were called out at 16.45 to respond to fire at Wilmont near Hernani. The fire had traveled 18 kms in about 1 hour. Conditions were horrendous when we got to the fire, helmets being blown off and very poor visibility. Supposed to be putting out fire in extremely unsafe conditions in a paddock and save cattle when peoples lives were at risk along Marengo Rd. Our Cat 1 decided to go down Marengo Rd to warn people. Fire on three sides, watching a house burn without being able to get near it. At about 8.30pm

returned to Tyringham to let people know about extreme conditions and the unpredictable nature of fire. Rang GI fire control to tell them that fire was heading towards Glen Ferneigh and Tyringham, was told that it was going in the opposite direction even though i could see the fire. Frustration at not being listened to and knowing that this fire was way beyond most of the local peoples' experience. (I had been in Ash Wednesday fires in Western Victoria). Local brigade not informed about what was happening re fire command and our local knowledge not used.

On duty 24 hours a day for the next 3 days. Dismay at watching the fire be downgraded at night when the Div Commander left and the temperature dropped even though Rel Humidity low and wind very strong. Listening to the roar of the fire and watching pyrotic storms at 1pm without having Div Commander present.

For the next 3.5 months had ongoing fires surrounding Dundurrabin in all directions. Often on duty for 12 to 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. Local knowledge often not listened to.

Very proud of the local Tyringham RFS and our community, who with an amazing effort by all managed to save so much. We also feed up to 200 people for 2 weeks out of our fire shed with no hot water and only one sink.

Even though the fires were devastating at the time, i have deep gratitude that we had the fires early, when temperatures were relatively low and we had support from other agencies and thanks for all the helicopter water bombing.

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

At Dundurrabin we had 4 years without proper summer rainfall so conditions were extremely dry. By August 2019 Dundurrabin had less than 300mm rainfall (only 20% of the average).

In July 2019 NPWS knew it would be a very bad fire season. Why was the Bees Nest Fire let burn for a week when it could have been controlled early? Was it under resourcing of people and equipment?

1.2 Preparation and planning

After major fires around NSW in the last few years what planning was done for this area?

The Hotspots program was effective in highlighting the high risk of Dundurrabin village to be impacted by fire. Tyringham RFS regularly trained once or twice a month. Other local residents need to do more to make their properties prepared for fire.

What was the NSW Forest Corp burn plan for the season? NSW Forest Corp appeared to have a totally different agenda to RFS. The main asset Forest Corp valued was the pine forest at Clouds Creek. No value appeared to be placed on World Heritage areas, Old Growth Forest and all the creatures living in them.

Why were such extensive control lines put in place without local consultation or knowledge of where a fire could be stopped. For example In the first or second week of the fire RFS could have put in a backburn / 200m containment line on Horseshoe Road near Billy's Creek instead Forestry insisted that the containment

line be along Wiriri Rd, bulldozing old growth trees and creating problems that tied up numerous resources for weeks and eventually all forestry containment lines failed and Clouds Creek Pine forest burnt on Friday 8th November 2019 (2 months after fire first impacted the district).

Why was a 50km containment line along Liberation trail planned and allowed to be put in? Which included dropping aerial incendiaries onto eucalypt ridges. This got totally out of control in early November and burnt out Nymboida.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Communication was a major issue for the fires around Durrurrabin / Tyringham. The fires were controlled from Glen Innes Fire Comm and this did not work. There were too many fires being run out of Glen Innes. We had no radio comms with Glen Innes for months. Ulmarra Fire Comm refused to help for many weeks even though we had radio comms with that area. We were communicating via mobile phones - some people had both Telstra and Optus phones. The electricity went out and phone towers went down. Particularly bad in November when the fires got totally out of control.

Local knowledge was not taken into account at the start of the Bees Nest fires early in September. Would have been much better to have a local go with each outside strike team. Tyringham RFS not included in decision making.

Some out of area strike teams were not experienced in our environment and would not go where they were needed. Tracks were too steep or they were not used to fires in rough bush terrain.

Very frustrating being told by DIV Comm to wait until they got air intel before strike teams deployed. For example one day at 8 am we could see fresh smoke and could have deployed strike teams. Were told to wait until helicopters went up - it was too windy then too smokey and finally they went up early afternoon and it was 1600 by the time decisions were made.

Big problems with change over of shifts both with Div Commanders and with strike teams accommodated a long way from the fires. Taking fire trucks back to accommodation rather than using buses to transport people. One Friday afternoon Tyringham RFS was told to stand for 48 hours - we all turned up between 6 and 7am on Saturday morning to find no replacements - people were not in place until the Sunday afternoon, so we worked more hours to protect local properties.

Forest Corp had a totally different way of dealing with fire. RFS volunteers aimed to put out fires asap doing back burns at night and fighting fire early in the day, Forest Corp let fires burn through the night and then get a bulldozer in the next day. Many of the Forest Corp Containment lines were ineffective and breached. On the Eastern Creek fire we (RFS) put in a back burn close to the fire only to be told that the containment line was 5 kms further away through stands of old growth forest that had not been burnt for 40 to 60 years. On the Sheepstation Creek fire we RFS would work until midnight or 2 am putting in solid containment lines only to find that the fire had been lit up on the other side of the containment line in country that Graeme Baldwin from Forest Corp wanted burnt. Often local RFS not informed when Forest Corp pulled out of an area.

On Monday 11th November 2019 the fires were totally out of control and declared too dangerous, all Forest Corp, NPWS and Fire and Rescue units were pulled out leaving locals to fight fires on at least 3 different fronts.

1.4 Any other matters

Community meetings were organised by Glen Innes? to be held at Tyringham Fire Shed when we had very active fires all around, and the area around the fire shed was being used as a staging area for up to 50 trucks. Inappropriate timing and very dangerous.

No Logistics and Operations support was given to the local area. Payment of local suppliers did not happen for many weeks - very difficult for small local businesses.

Clarence Valley Council gave no support to Tyringham RFS in the first 2 weeks of the Bees Nest Fires and we have had minimal support since then. One problem is the long time (at least another year) before 2 burnt out bridges will be replaced on Armidale Road.

It would be good to have local input into suggestions for improvements that could be made to RFS including more comms training for local RFS.

We are very thankful for planned extension to Tyringham fire shed and new equipment that has been promised. Hope it all eventuates.

Given the worsening fires and more extreme conditions it is important to build capacity and resilience at a local level.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Supporting documents or images
