

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 was in Mallacoota, Victoria with my family during the New Years Eve 2019 bushfire. It was harrowing, however we consider ourselves lucky. With good preparation, hard work and helpful neighbours, we saved our family house. Many around us were not so lucky.

After being evacuated by air, we returned to our home on the western edge of Canberra, and spent the next several weeks closely monitoring the fires in the ACT and over the border in NSW.

Some things I learnt from my experiences this summer:

1. Months of planning, preparation and effort in the lead-up to summer meant my family had the resources and information to make sensible and safe decisions, and ultimately to save our house.
2. It is difficult to be fully prepared near a State/Territory border, when one has to monitor several State-based apps and websites etc with different warning systems and terminology etc.
3. Conflicting advice and messages on State and Territory communication platforms (eg in relation to evacuations

- and road closures) resulted in community confusion, delay and distrust.
4. Allowing residents to stay and defend their homes and/or return to their properties soon after the fire front had passed, saved homes.
 5. The terrifying sight and sound of a house burning down is something I never wish to experience again. I saw four nearby homes burn on NYE and will forever regret that we were unable to save them (as we defending our own home).
 6. Simple planning and preparatory steps by neighbours (eg reducing fuel around the house, pre-filled bins and buckets of water, hoses that extended all over the property, etc) meant we were able to save some neighbours homes, even in their absence.
 7. Wooden fences allow fires to 'creep' through urban areas and set homes alight long after the fire front has passed.
 8. Incorrect handling and placement of gas cylinders meant homes ignited well after the fire front had passed.
 9. The VicEmergency app appears to be better than the NSW Fires Near Me app for a number of reasons, including because it allows for a bigger watch zone and identifies a visual warning zone.
 10. It would be useful if there were current maps available online showing active fire areas, rather than just burn areas. The fire prediction maps provided on some days went some way towards addressing this.
 11. It would be helpful to have current time series maps available online showing the direction, growth and speed etc of fires.
 12. 'Extinguished' fires should be left on apps until the end of the bushfire season. Burnt areas provide useful information for those preparing and monitoring ongoing threats.
 13. ABC Emergency and local community radio reporting was life saving, particularly when there was no electricity or Internet connection.
 14. Telstra was more reliable than Optus in terms of coverage and signal, particularly in regional areas.
 15. Long before the bushfire threat was over, some advice warnings stated 'there are many areas that are now safe for people to visit'. This was shown to be inappropriate and irresponsible when conditions deteriorated, and communities were required to evacuate multiple times.
 16. Strong messaging from the ACT government discouraging 'disaster tourism' etc was appreciated by communities dealing with ongoing bushfire threats. Indeed, the leadership shown by ACT Commissioner Whelan this summer was exemplary – an example for many.

Here are some specific suggestions for consideration:

17. We need a nationally consistent approach for bushfire warnings, terminology and advice etc.
18. There needs to be a consistent and timely approach for updating information across State and Territory communications – eg apps, websites, and Facebook pages.
19. It would be helpful to have a national app with consistent terminology, advice and time series maps showing active and burnt fire areas.
20. In the lead-up to the bushfire season, communities need to be more actively encouraged to prepare themselves and their homes, particularly those in bushfire prone areas. Warnings and fines should be considered where properties have not been adequately prepared.
21. There needs to be an increased emphasis on shared responsibility and ensuring safety and survival if an emergency develops. Communities need to be aware that even if they don't plan to stay and defend, there is a shared responsibility to keep people safe - eg for neighbours who might stay, and for firefighters who might be defending property, etc.
22. There needs to be a review of the emphasis on having a 'fire survival plan' (which is often understood to essentially mean an 'evacuation plan'). Instead communities should be encouraged to thoroughly plan in advance, prepare their properties, remain well informed, AND have an evacuation plan.
23. More detailed information about the equipment and safety gear required, and how to use it, when staying to defend a property should be available on emergency websites etc.
24. Detailed information on what to do with gas bottles and gas cylinders needs to be more easily available on emergency websites etc, particularly for tourist regions and homes in rural and remote communities that rely on gas cylinders.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images
