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## Your details

Mr

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**Title**

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**First name**

Allan

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**Last name**

Leggett

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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 give my consent for this submission to be made public

## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

My wife and I have been residents of Talbingo since we retired to live in the house we owned here in 2012. I would like to share my experience and suggestion for future action as a result of this experience.

After a meeting that was called by the RFS on Friday 3rd January advised us to either evacuate the town or if we decided to stay and defend then if necessary a siren would advise us if we needed to go to the nominated evacuation centre.

Myself, my son and his wife decided we would stay and defend whilst the rest of our family would evacuate from the town.

In preparation for what seemed an imminent ember attack, we had already joined with a group of our neighbours and spent the last couple of days cleaning gutters and debris from not just our own houses, but also the vacant holiday homes that surrounded us. The meeting at the club spurred us on. By about 3.00PM on

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the Saturday we believed we were in a pretty good position to defend ours and our neighbours property from falling embers.

By 5.30pm, however, smoke started billowing from the North West of us and the familiar glow appeared over the mountains just south of Journama Dam Wall. As the roar returned and the clouds of smoke billowed directly over us, it became evident that this was the one we needed to watch. At 5.50pm, the previous scene was repeated as the flames left over the mountain and were heading quickly towards Journama pond. Then came what was described as mini cyclonic winds and roofing sheets began floating through the air, sending us all to take cover. In less than 10 minutes the fire had reached Journama pond and embers started numerous fires along the Eastern bank. What we were unaware of, was that the fire to the South West had also crossed at T3 power station and along the road between the station and the township. This fire now came across the Eastern side of Talbingo, leaving the town surrounded by a ring of fire. The RFS called for an evacuation to the Country club where we parked our vehicles on the green areas of the golf course. Around 7.00 pm the power went out and by about 8.00 pm all phone service was gone.

BY about 10.00 pm many of us decided the emergency seemed to be over and most of us returned to our houses, thankful that for the most part, Talbingo had escaped the fury of the fire.

There are many people who we need to thank for the tremendous effort that was put in to this experience. The local RFS team led by John Scott along with teams from other towns and private people with firefighting equipment stand out as deserving the gratitude of all the Talbingo residents. The Country Club stands out for providing a place of refuge and refreshments. The Police and the SES also played a very important role. The Snowy Valley Council, particularly our local workers, have all done everything they could to get us through this potential catastrophe.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

As someone who is conscious of world events and spent all his life in Western NSW, there is no doubt in my mind about the significant part that has been played by climate change; first of all in the extreme temperatures and secondly in the drought that has sapped the moisture from the environment.

All the climate scientists and experts in the field can no longer be ignored. The Australian government has to stop allowing the climate change deniers to influence its decision making and lead by example by developing a much stronger emphasis on moving to a carbon neutral economy. It will also have to be a credible voice in the world community in promoting genuine clean energy.

There has been a lot of discussion about the consequences of insufficient hazard reduction burns being done especially in National Parks and state forests. I do not profess to having much knowledge of this, but it seems to me, that it is the indigenous land management practices that would give the best hopes of giving a reasonable result in reducing the fuel loads and preserving the flora and fauna in these at the same time.

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## **1.2 Preparation and planning**

The science tells us that even if we could become carbon neutral Tomorrow, Global warming and its catastrophic effects will continue for years to come. Extreme weather events will continue to expand and the sort of fire events we have just experienced will become far more common experiences that we will need to learn to live with and there are much more knowledgeable and experienced members of our communities than myself that can work out what sort of equipment and planning we need to help control the future events

I would, however, like to make a simple suggestion that would make a difference to communities such as Talbingo.

Talbingo is a small community with a permanent population of less than 200 . Most of our residents are retirees but we also have a lot of holiday homes here where people may only occupy a couple of times a year. Whilst some owners do keep the amount of combustible growth around their homes to a reasonable level, there are a lot that don't. Those owners that don't are at high risk of ember attacks and consequently pose a great threat to not just their own premises, but the other homes that surround them. As anyone who has been through one of the modern high heat fires can attest to, once a house is on fire, its very difficult to stop nearby premises also igniting and the results can be devastating. Our local RFS Captain expressed his extreme frustration at having to spend so much of their limited resources preventing ensuring these places do not becoming a threat to the wider community. It has to be also noted, that not all of these residences are holiday houses. There are a few of them that are occupied full time but the owners are not interested in cleaning them up. This leaves the rest of the community at risk.

A number of these premises have been reported to the RFS who have in turn reported them to the council but no action has been taken. Whether this lack of action is because councils do not have sufficient power or lack the resources to follow up I do not know.

I would like to propose that the RFS be given permission to do an audit of the combustible materials around all the houses in the community and the owners be given an opportunity to bring them up to a reasonable standard before the fire season starts. If they fail to do this then the council should have the power to take the necessary action to make sure the situation is rectified. It is unfair to the other residents who do make reasonable attempts to make their homes safe from an ember attack.

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## **1.4 Any other matters**

In the Talbingo area, the value of the Country Club as an evacuation point stood out strongly on this occasion, even though it was not the official evacuation point. (The official one was the sports oval that actually burnt.) The Country Club with its green and well kept greenery made far more sense, especially with the sprinklers running. We could park our vehicles there and feel comfortable they would not catch alight.

The only problem here was when the power went out they had no back up generator. If there was some funds available to help rectify this it would make a big difference if the situation or one like it occurs in the future

## **Supporting documents or images**

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