

## Your details

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**Title**

Mr

**First name**

Andrew

**Last name**

Elks

## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

A primary producer

**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

**Your position in the organisation (if applicable)**

Owner/manager

**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**

I own a property 7kms down [REDACTED] it has approx 5kms frontage to the Guy Fawkes wilderness area. On the 4/9/19 I heard that there was a fire on the Guyra side of the park on bees nest ridge. I talked to [REDACTED] from npws about this and asked her to keep me informed about it as my place was east of this and directly in front of it if we got westerly winds.

On the 5/9/19 I started to prepare the the fire trail and my place just in case they couldn't control the fire on the Guyra side. Aprox 1pm on the 6/9/19 the dozer hired by npws turned up at my place and we did further work to the

trail in a rush, we never got to finish cleaning off the trail as I was informed by npws that they had lost the fire on the Guyra side and it was heading our way. The fire came out of the wilderness area on my southern boundary with [REDACTED] which is about 4kms from my sheds and yards the decision was made due to the fire's intensity to move back there to try and protect this infrastructure. I worked for State Forests for 18 yrs and have been to a lot of fires previously to this, but I have never seen anything like this fire, it was a fire storm the winds were terrible. [REDACTED] told me earlier on that all the gov agencies and rfs were on stand by so I didn't think I needed to organise help. No one turned up to help I had my fire unit on my tractor and my quad with my nephew on it to protect 2 houses and the yards and sheds. The fire when in timbered country was not manageable but when it came onto cleared improved country it was defensible the issue I had, was that it was burning on 3 fronts with only one decent fire unit, triple zero was called by both houses to no avail. There was one npws vehicle on the rd near my yards but they didn't give me any assistance with the fire at all which is so wrong as I was desperate. If I had one more fire fighting unit with me I could have kept the fire a km away quite easily. Approx at 1.30am the fire had passed through heading east, I was prepared for the fire but I was not prepared for no help, when I was told that it would be there. I am disappointed that there was not a debrief in our area so we could find out why this was the case. There was zero communication from rfs and npws at the time of the fire or the following day to say I was disappointed is an understatement. Also later on I was told by locals on the Guyra side that this was only a couple of ha big for approx a week before it went out of control if that was the case I don't understand why with the New England being so dry why npws didn't throw everything at it to stop it.

## 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

In 1993/94 we had a fire burn out 3 kms north of where this one came out it also burnt out the whole Guyfawkes gorge but we managed to keep it in the gorge with a continuous back burn all the way around. In my opinion 2019 was not a lot dryer than 93/94. The big difference was the fuel load in the wilderness area was horrendous as it had not been burnt directly behind home since I sold it to npws in 2003 this fuel load turned this fire into a fire storm to the likes that we have never seen before and don't want to see again. The winds generated by this made this fire uncontrollable.

### 1.2 Preparation and planning

There needs to be a major change in management practices to these areas as npws are there to look after the fauna and flora and this fire killed everything in its path nothing escaped I have never seen such devastation in my life. The stink from decaying animals lasted 6 weeks after this. The erosion that has happened due to no ground cover in the Guyfawkes would be horrendous as I saw what it was like in 93/94 and it was only a billy fire compared to this.

### 1.3 Response to bushfires

The local community response was great as was the local land services response they really helped when it was needed. Also the help we have received from the state gov to help recover has been terrific. The issue I see with the management of these fires is that they are run out of an office in this case Glen Innes which does not allow for decisions to be made on the ground by local rfs members with local knowledge. Also talking to other fire affected landholders later on when rfs bought in outside help was that their orders were for property protection only and they were not interested in putting the fire out. I do realise that this year has been an unprecedented year for fires, there is no doubt we have a changing environment but in the last 20 yrs there has been a very little hazard reduction by gov agencies of all descriptions and burning plans are all most impossible to comply with, in this type of country there needs to be a different approach in the coming years if we don't want to see a repeat of this

### 1.4 Any other matters

This fire was in September and it was quite cold only 2 days later it sleeted, if this fire had got going on a 40 deg day there would of been lives lost for sure so in that sense we were lucky it came through when it did

## Supporting documents or images

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**Attach files**

- C6FD36DA-5531-4035-8129-8FB5F89C360C.jpeg
- 7EA08816-7165-4713-AE12-F76393BA07B0.jpeg
- DE68E7CD-82A1-44E6-B08F-F00BA44B6DFA.jpeg







