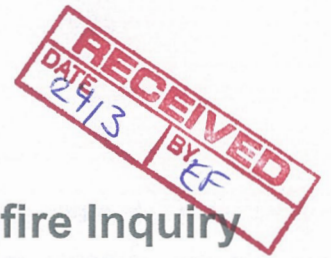




NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry



Submission Application

If you are making this submission anonymously you do not need to fill in any personal details.

Applicant Information

Full Name: ANDREW VALJA

Address: _____
Street Address Apartment/Unit #

City State Postcode

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I give consent to make this submission? Public Anonymous Confidential

Signature

Please note the Inquiry will retain discretion to withhold publishing any information that may be considered personal or defamatory in nature.

Signature: _____ Date: 20/3/20

Submission details

I am making this submission as

- A resident in a bushfire-affected area
- Emergency Services personnel
- A business owner
- A primary producer
- An academic/researcher
- A member of the general public
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Submission type

- I am making a personal submission
- I am submitting on behalf of my organization

Organisation making the submission (if applicable): _____

Your position in the organisation (if applicable): _____



Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I live at Dargan, NSW which was severely affected by 2 bushfires (from opposite directions) on the same day, i.e. 21 Dec. 2019. About half the houses in my street were burnt down. I am not writing this to be critical of the fire authorities, but I feel I need to point out a few things that made things worse.

I was monitoring the situation (the Gasparr Mtn fire) for weeks before the fire hit Dargan, looking at online info such as Fires Near Me, etc and attending local RFS meetings. Four days before the fire we were told at an RFS meeting that it was very unlikely that a fire would come up to us from Lithgow, as they had been back burning a lot to the north of us. Containment lines and back burning had been going on for weeks, but these did not work to stop the Gasparr Mtn fire, but rather helped to spread it far and wide. "Old-style back-burning", such as lighting up 14km in one day on the Newmar plateau, is not a good idea in conditions of drought and high temperatures.

Another good example was the bad decision to light up next to the road at Wolgan Gap (near Anyar Place). By the next day the adjoining state forest (Ben Bullen) had caught alight and ended up burning the whole state forest and even threatening Mt Piper power station many kms to the south, and the town of Cullen Bullen to the west. The people who decide where, when and how to back burn need

to adapt to more extreme conditions, as the fires are not controllable.

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

I think the severity and widespread nature of the fires
Made worse by ^{war} back burning operations getting out of control.
due to the climatic conditions (drought, heat, etc).
eg. caused the Grace Valley fire
" " fire in Ben Bulbin State Forest
" " situation to be worse in Newmar S.F.
I believe the devastating fire at Dargan were caused
by back burning gone wrong. Even the RFS (Clarence/Dargan)
was surprised on 21 Dec. when the fire swept up from
Lithgow and burnt all the way to Dargan. Several RFS
members lost their own houses. Why didn't they know it
was coming?

1.2 Preparation and planning

The RFS should have access to the best and latest
fire info from satellites, and communication within the RFS
should be improved, so that the "troops on the ground" can
have up to the minute information about where the fire is,
and where it is heading, and allocate assets where they
are most needed at that time.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Online information was good, but some of it would be better if more up to the minute. eg. fire maps on Fires Near Me were only updated about once a day.

Coordination of the distribution of fire-fighting assets, i.e. fire trucks, aircraft, etc. could have been better at the height of the fire in my locality. When half my street was burning most of the fire trucks were elsewhere (at Clarence, Lithgow, etc). I think up to the minute info would enable coordinators to distribute assets better.

The Galfers Mtn fire should have been put out in its early stages, before it grew into a monster. The Grose Valley fire was caused by backburning

1.4 Any other matters

and it caused a hell of a lot of damage and destruction. 3 months later, trams are still not running to Lithgow.

I hate to say it, but I now have less confidence in what the RFS tells us and how they might respond. Hopefully this and other bushfire enquiries will highlight what went wrong and improve future responses.

Supporting documents or images

Please attach any other files you would like to include in your submission.