

Your details

Title

Ms

First name

Anna

Last name

Russell

Submission details

I am making this submission as

An academic/researcher

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Organisation making the submission (if applicable)

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Data Scientist

Consent to make submission public

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I am a senior data analyst at [REDACTED] and part of the team that authored [REDACTED]'s bushfire impact assessment reporting, which was received by 50 government agencies nationwide. In this role, I have obtained in depth understanding of the geographic spread of the fire grounds, the mix of human settlement and natural habitat, and the timescale of the destruction. In addition to this, I have been volunteering through ARC and Hunter Wildlife Rescue to help with their bush feeding/ water station distribution post-fire and thus seen the devastation first hand, as well as heard more detail from wildlife carers and vets who have been on the ground throughout the fire season.

As a town planner by training, I have also been offering pro-bono support to a number of fire affected homeowners in navigating through the rebuild approval process.

I am sharing my perspective primarily as a researcher and observer, acknowledging that my in-person experience has been restricted to intermittent support of post-fire recovery.

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

Contributing factors to this being a particularly bad fire season include:

1. Significant drought conditions
2. Limited and/ or ineffective preventative action
3. Lack of early action by government to shut down national park access to reduce human-instigated fires.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Insufficient large scale firefighting equipment

Heavy reliance on volunteer RFS forces is irresponsible on the part of government. Whilst these firefighters are amazing and were true heroes this fire season, the government's dependence on unpaid volunteers placed a huge financial burden on those volunteers and the businesses who employ them. We need to treat RFS like Army Reserve or other government supported intermittent forces.

1.3 Response to bushfires

HUMAN:

Initial crisis response mounted was initially too reliant on volunteers. Army should have been recruited earlier to support relocation and also fire mitigation activities.

The ongoing government response continues to feel disjointed. There have been good initiatives but the time taken to deploy, and the number of forms / calls required to activate recovery support needs review. Traumatized fire affected communities struggle with complex paper work.

WILDLIFE:

Whilst response from rural fire services was strong for fire affected communities at the time of the fire, that response was not extended to bushland and native habitat including nationally significant wildlife release areas at Hammers Hill and Kalandan (Peak View area).

Post-fire response from government and major NGOs was slow and uncoordinated. Financial and material support for wildlife carers, rescuers and bush feeding in the weeks post-fire was minimal, and access restrictions significantly increased the number of animals that suffered and died from injuries, starvation and dehydration.

Whilst it may be the government's first priority to focus on people, over 90% of the area burned was bushland, not human settlements and the level of destruction is immense. It is shortsighted for an economy that depends on its unique flora and fauna to fail to stage any efforts to protect or recover them in an environmental emergency.

1.4 Any other matters

The impact of this fire season on native animals and habitat is not over. As we move into the colder months it is critical that support is provided to local rescue groups to continue support feeding and water stations, and to continue their work in caring for and releasing recovered fire victims into the wild.

The impact is also not over for humans. The government clean up response has been slow and the requirement for standard planning approvals has left many unable to rebuild.

Supporting documents or images
