



## Your details

Ms

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**Title**

**First name**

Anne

**Last name**

Pidcock

## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

**Organisation making the submission (if applicable)**

NA

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

NA

**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**

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I live on 47 acres in Penrose in the Southern Highlands of NSW. The Morton bushfire impacted directly on our property on two occasions: the 4 January and the 10 January 2020. I had left a week earlier due to health issues arising from the constant smoke.

On 4 January the fire came up from Wingello State Forest and the gullies behind us and burnt out 3/4 of our property, between

Johnson's Point Fire Trail and Arcadia Fire Trail. It was stopped at the Arcadia Fire Trail by vigilant neighbours. The local fire brigade and other firefighting services were engaged elsewhere, so our neighbours were on their own.

On 10 January the fire again came through the same area, further decimating the eucalypt woodlands, rainforest, creek and escarpment. If it had not been for a sudden, unpredicted change in wind direction, the fire would have been much more devastating.

We were fortunate that our house and surrounding garden escaped the ferocity of the fire but I am saddened by the destruction of so much beautiful bushland and the loss of so many native animals.

In close to 30 years that we have lived here, fire is something that we have learned to respect and to live with. Preparation and appropriate land management are all part and parcel of being a rural landholder. However, the fires we experienced in the past summer were unprecedented. Drought, tinder dry scrub, and the lack of any moisture in the soil and subsoil were undoubtedly key factors in creating conditions ideal for igniting such these relentless fires.

Our local Penrose and Wingello Bush Fire Brigades worked tirelessly over the 27 days that the Morton fire raged around Penrose and Wingello. They carried out hazard reductions, created containment trails, dealt with major and minor fire outbreaks and reignitions and worked around the clock in some instances to actively defend their villages. We are all very proud of the work carried out by these amazing volunteers.

When the Committee delivers its final report, I hope that they will give due recognition to the incredible effort these teams put into fighting one of the worst fires we have ever seen in our area.

These men, women and young adults acted above and beyond any call to duty and with no thought of acknowledgement of the sacrifices that they were making. This past summer has been etched indelibly into the minds and bodies of these volunteers and without their valiant efforts our small corner of the Southern Highlands may not have survived against the onslaught of the fire storm.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

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### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Those with more technical knowledge will no doubt offer reasons for this.

### 1.2 Preparation and planning

- Preparation and planning

Factors contributing to difficulty in planning a defence against bush fire attack in our local area include:  
The proximity of mature trees potentially blocking escape to the main access roads to and from our village: The Highland Way, Penrose Rd, Wingello Rd, Murrimba Road and Penrose Forest Way.

Difficulty in maintaining narrow firetrails that traverse private properties but require considerable resources to maintain. The fire trails generally stop at escarpments, prohibiting any fire escape that way.

Maintenance of firetrails being left to local brigades and landowners, even though the trails are used by NPWS, State

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Forests and civilians (4WD enthusiasts etc).

Towering radiata pines planted many years ago on nature strips along the Highland Way through Penrose are now ageing and dropping branches. They pose a health hazard to traffic and people, a safety concern to electricity contractors and an imminent bush fire risk. Trees are planted OUTSIDE private properties, so they should not be the responsibility of current owners to remove or maintain.

Mature trees, such as Monterey Cypress, planted on many properties 80 to 100 years ago are now growing so close to houses that the bush fire brigades have deemed these properties to be 'undefendable.' The cost of removing these trees is prohibitive for a private landholder but if funding were available to assist timber harvesters to cut, collect and mill this valuable timber than it would be repurposed instead of going up in smoke when bushfires approach.

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### **1.3 Response to bushfires**

Our local brigades were fantastic in their response to this very difficult situation. However, the overlapping interests of local brigades, NPWS and Forestry in this area at times created tensions that perhaps could have been better managed. Forestry officers at one stage wanted to do a backburn through an unburnt gully on our property, even though we knew that two neighbouring houses were downwind of that gully, a fact possibly unknown to Forestry but known to our local brigade. Some backburns in Penrose DID get out of control (Lukes Fire Trail, Koolibah Lane, Jeffrey's Fire Trail). I don't know why this happened but perhaps the line of command between various agencies attending a fire needs to be better delineated. The local brigade will, in most instances, have better local knowledge of the immediate area and residents and are better prepared to suggest appropriate defensive or offensive strategies.

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### **1.4 Any other matters**

Containment trails that were hastily constructed and dissected properties were an issue for many landowners. Gates and fences were demolished so that trails could be constructed. Although everyone agreed at the time that this action was absolutely necessary, the trails were an impediment to stock containment and agricultural pursuits. Temporary containment trails have now been repaired in our area but next summer a need may again arise for them to be constructed. Perhaps consideration could be given to something of a more permanent nature that is mutually beneficial to both landholder and the fire fighting services requiring access.

Three Photos of the area on our property affected by the fire are attached.

## **Supporting documents or images**

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### **Attach files**

- Arcadia Fire Trail.jpg
  - Johnsons Point Fire Trail1.jpg
  - Johnsons Point Fire Trail2.JPG
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