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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**

Douch

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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**

I have lived in the Bermagui area all my life-67 years. Have worked in the bush (forests) for 50 years, 45 years employed by Forest Corp(Forestry Commission of NSW). Retired for the past 4 years. Have fought and been involved in bush fires and fire management during all those years. I was a fire tanker operator and in the later years acted as a divisional commander for Forest Corp in fighting many fires with up to 50 people under my supervision. Forest Corp employed firefighters, NPWS, RFS Teams and heavy plant operators. The 2019/2020 were more catastrophic than any other fire due to their size and behaviour. When the Badja fire began and not controlled within a few days it was apparent that the first extreme weather day with north west winds the fire would run toward the coast . This occurred on the 30th Dec 2019. No one expected the fire to travel so fast during the night. My wife and I woke early on the morning of 31st Dec with endless traffic coming into Bermagui- evacuated from surrounding areas. We evacuated Bermagui on

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the 3rd Jan. 2020 after attending a town meeting at the Bermagui Country Club. The Mayor BVSC advised everyone to leave Bermagui as the town could not be defended against further firefronts. We returned 8 days later once power , communications, fuel and food became available. On the 23rd January another extreme weather day with the fire breaking containment lines and approached Bermagui. However with a cooler southerly wind change the fire slowed and Bermagui town was not burnt.

After this I volunteered to assist the local RFS who were short on resources and stretched to the limit after such a long season of firefighting. Using my knowledge of the local forests I supervised the drivers of several bulldozers and a grader and for the next week opening up a lot of old tracks ,roads and containment lines around Bermagui. These containment lines were to be used as a back up for any backburns if the fire escaped again.

## 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

1. Severe Drought-last 10 years have been continually dry
2. Fuel Load- Massive fuel loads have accumulated in all forest areas due to lack of Hazard reduction burning. Parts of the forest and bush surrounding Bermagui have not been burnt for at least 30 years.
3. Weather-Extreme heat and dry conditions over a long period of time.

The combination of these 3 factors created the catastrophic conditions. A fire can be likened to a triangle with 3 elements(sides)-temperature, wind strength, fuel load. Remove any of these elements and the danger decreases.

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

All government agencies that are land managers need to plan and conduct hazard reduction and community protection burns throughout the the winter or outside fire danger periods. The RFS should be used to assist other agencies to conduct community burns. Forested areas strategically placed cleared control lines need establishing and kept mowed and cleared with these lines used to protect towns and communities. Maintained by a paid RFS team from each Community. Hazard reduction burns can take place easier with wider control lines established along exiting roads in the forests. These burns need planning and separating into manageable blocks of forest to be burnt every 5 years to continually manage fuel loads. Forested sections of private property need assessing by RFS for hazard reduction purposes. Laws & Legislation need relaxing to allow these practises to happen. Alterations to the Threatened Species Act are required to allow hazard reduction burns to strategically occur. Thousands of species were killed during the recent wildfires.. Councils need to reconsider building standards allowing dwellings to be erected in heavily forested areas.

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### 1.3 Response to bushfires

Govt. agencies -Forest Corp, NPWS need to increase their staff for fire control. Fire fighting in summer and hazard reduction in winter with machinery to assist Many experienced staff either retired or were made redundant in recent years. RFS need at least 2 full time paid staff at each fire shed to carry out and organise community protection burns, planning of burns, negotiating with private property owners and keeping forestry tracks, trails and cleared breaks open during winter months ready for the next fire season. They could also assist Forest Corp and NPWS in conducting these burns. The local Indigenous

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Community should be involved in these burns in sensitive areas. Reliable power supplies need establishing-consider underground power and replacing wooden poles with fire resistant poles. Mobile phone towers need back up power(generators) in concrete bunkers next to each tower. All agencies need a communal radio system.

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#### **1.4 Any other matters**

The local ABC South East Radio proved to be a lifeline for communicating and providing current news to the public. Regular updates from the RFS proved invaluable. The RFS App-Fires Near me-and the GIS Arcview website were valuable to the public to follow the direction of the fires until all power was lost. Battery operated radios proved invaluable when all other communications were lost-this really needs emphasizing this should be part of your bush fire plan.. Houses in rural areas need to have sprinkler systems installed on their roof. Once a fire is declared an emergency the Federal Govt need to remunerate State Govts. for half the cost. Federal Govt should have defence personnel trained in bushfire fighting and engage them as soon as an emergency is declared. Permanent Large air Tankers are needed to remain in Australia as well as increase water bombing planes and helicopters available. These are a valuable support to ground crew in dangerous situations.

### **Supporting documents or images**

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