



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Barry

Last name

McDonald

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A member of the general public

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

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 former public servant (now retired) and served on a local RFS brigade in the Snowy Mountains up to 2017 (since left the area). I have been involved previously in regional coordination of NSW government agencies in South East NSW and delivering regional business and industry assistance programs.

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

1. Drought which recurs every decade or so.
2. The low rainfall in late 2019 exacerbated the drought problems of excessive dry vegetation everywhere.
3. Some deliberate acts of arson (exacerbating 1. and 2.)
4. Lack of hazard reduction by the NPWS in national parks. This is an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed. The NSW NPWS have highlighted they conducted hazard reduction burnoffs of some 135,000ha in 2019 (this figure seems to vary by 1000ha or so in different articles). What they don't say is this is less than 2% of the 7million odd hectares under their control. It could be questioned why they bother? Apart from budget constraints it would appear there is entrenched resistance to burnoffs inside the NPWS and you don't hear them calling for greater hazard reduction activity.

1.2 Preparation and planning

A continuous program to burnoff 10% of all national parks each year for large scale hazard reduction needs to be implemented. This will ensure that all national parks have new vegetation every decade thus eliminating multiple decades of decaying growth which caused so much devastation this summer. We often hear stories of aboriginal groups conducting regular burnoffs centuries ago at various locations and they probably did. This simple regular burning off would have eliminated years and decades of dead vegetation buildup. Their needs to be a serious will to take planned large scale hazard reduction burnoffs out of the "too hard" basket where they currently sit. State environment Departments and their divisions (like NPWS in NSW) need to be told to cooperate. Controlled slow burnoffs in ideal conditions (like winter) will allow animals to move out of the way and escape injury. Even koalas could be relocated beforehand. It will also allow fire crews to manage with minimal risk of emergency issues – sadly some of these were fatal this summer. It doesn't matter if you believe in climate change theories or not. What I am recommending is a way to improve preparation and planning for future bushfire seasons and give better resilience to mitigate the impacts of these natural disasters which we are prone to.

1.3 Response to bushfires

In my opinion the NSW RFS responded as best it could to the recent bushfires. The commendations to Shane Fitzsimmons and his team are justified. Their needs to be a serious will to take planned large scale hazard reduction burnoffs out of the "too hard" basket where they currently sit. State environment Departments and their divisions (like NPWS in NSW) need to be told to cooperate. There should be no excuses or exemptions for not doing burnoffs. Any resistance by organisations and individuals needs forceful compliance, if required. Funding needs to be both Federal and State supported. It is good the Prime Minister announced \$2Bn initial funding for national efforts to rebuild & recover so this needs to be evolved into the higher level controlled burnoff program. Once established and implemented the annual cost should progressively come down.

1.4 Any other matters

Attached FYI is the submission I made to the Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Bushfire Royal Commission). It contains much of what I have state in your categories above. Happy to clarify any of my comments.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- Climate 1.2.doc
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SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO NATIONAL NATURAL DISASTER ARRANGEMENTS.

Commissioners:

I make my submission with a focus on addressing item b. in your Terms of Reference, namely:- *Australia's arrangements for improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions, what actions should be taken to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, and whether accountability for natural disaster risk management, preparedness, resilience and recovery should be enhanced, including through a nationally consistent accountability and reporting framework and national standards;* with a particular emphasis on **improving resilience** and **mitigating impacts of natural disasters**.

The recent 2019/20 summer bushfires have demonstrated Australia's vulnerability to hot weather extremes – especially in times of drought which recur every decade or so. The low rainfall in late 2019 exacerbated the problems.

There is much hysteria blaming climate change in social & mainstream media for the bushfires but no solutions put forward or ways to deal with future bushfires. A common sense approach is needed to manage it in future. Governments (all levels) need to change their approach.

Some Basic Facts:

- Planet Earth has moved in and out of varying climate cycles over hundreds and thousands of years and will continue to do so for the next hundreds and thousands of years. Solar activity on the sun is the main influence.
- Australia is the driest continent on Earth and is a land of climate extremes. It has been for as long as we know. The recent February heavy rains following the bushfires demonstrate this. This is not the result of recent climate change that many claim it to be but evolving nature of climate over long periods of time.
- Australia has the sparsest population (over total land area) of any country in the world but is also the most urbanised with majority of people living in capital cities. Therefore the remainder of the population is sparsely scattered throughout the country giving us the highest bushland to people ratio in the world.
- Australia's bushland is mostly dry in nature and with warm summers there are going to be bushfires occasionally. This is unavoidable especially for natural events – like drought, dry lightning strikes and accidents.
- The NSW NPWS have highlighted they conducted hazard reduction burnoffs of some 135,000ha in 2019 (this figure seems to vary by 1000ha or so in different articles). **What they don't say is this is less than 2% of the 7million odd hectares under their control.** It could be questioned why they bother? Apart from budget constraints it would appear there is entrenched resistance to burnoffs inside the NPWS and you don't hear them calling for greater hazard reduction activity.
- The recent summer bushfires nearly all started in national parks. Some were deliberate. The terrain inside national parks is often difficult for fire crews to access so fires gain momentum from decades of decayed vegetation and become unstoppable as we have seen. Also, activities by NPWS in blocking previous fire trails and tracks can inhibit fire crews access when needed.

- Man's influence in climate changing planet Earth is mainly due to factors such as excessive population growth and land clearing in some nations. Organisations like the United Nations and IPCC who erroneously blame developed nations for all these problems need to be corrected. Developed nations usually manage and protect their environments and have higher living standards and cleaner lifestyles. The UN and IPCC along with some religious groups simply ignore factors like overpopulation and excess land clearing.
- The January 2003 bushfires which devastated much of Kosciuszko National Park and the ACT should have been a wake up call to implement serious plans to reduce future risks of bushfire devastation. Unfortunately it wasn't. Numerous bureaucratic enquiries looking for excuses were conducted and their reports are now gathering dust on shelves. Home builders were hit with new regulations restricting house designs that really do very little to resist a major bushfire.

Recommendations and Actions to address the problem:

A serious change of attitude by all Governments to reduce future bushfire risks is needed and new plans need to be formulated and implemented.

It doesn't matter if you believe in climate change theories or not. What I am recommending is a way to *improve resilience and mitigate the impacts of natural disasters*.

A continuous program to burnoff 10% of all national parks each year for large scale hazard reduction needs to be implemented. This will ensure that all national parks have new vegetation every decade thus eliminating multiple decades of decaying growth which caused so much devastation this summer.

We often hear stories of aboriginal groups conducting regular burnoffs centuries ago of various locations and they probably did. This simple regular burning off would have eliminated years and decades of dead vegetation buildup.

The January 2003 bushfires in Kosciuszko National Park didn't burn the old Kiandra village or Selwyn Snow Resort but the recent summer bushfires certainly did – **a clear indication that a further 17 years of decayed vegetation build-up played a significant role in the devastation.**

Priority for burnoffs should be based on proximity to towns & villages who are the most vulnerable. We don't want another repeat of this summer's devastation ever again.

Their needs to be a serious will to take planned large scale hazard reduction burnoffs out of the "too hard" basket where they currently sit. State environment Departments and their divisions (like NPWS in NSW) need to be told to cooperate.

Controlled slow burnoffs in ideal conditions (like winter) will allow animals to move out of the way and escape injury. Even koalas could be relocated beforehand. It will also allow fire crews to manage with minimal risk of emergency issues – sadly some of these were fatal this summer.

There should be no excuses or exemptions for not doing burnoffs. Any resistance by organisations and individuals needs forceful compliance, if required.

Funding needs to be both Federal and State supported. It is good the Prime Minister announced \$2Bn initial funding for national efforts to rebuild & recover so this needs to be evolved into the higher level controlled burnoff program. Once established and implemented the annual cost should progressively come down.

The Prime Minister has described the recent bushfires, weather and climate as "*the new normal*". If this is so then what I am suggesting above should address it. We need implement ways to adapt to any change, not dream up populist ideology to deal with it in some imaginary way.

Other issues:

The exaggerated influence of social media needs to be curtailed. Hollywood hypocrites (rich actors with high carbon burning lifestyles and oversized mansions, stretched limousines, executive jets and the like) who claim to be champions of the environment need to be ignored. Biased national news media also needs to be brought to account.

School curriculums need to better address environmental management and remove the doom and gloom of climate change that currently prevails which is stressing some students. Unqualified celebrities promoted by mainstream and social media also need to be ignored.

There should be no cost shifting to local governments by State and Federal Governments in addressing the problems. For example, 78% of Eurobodalla Shire in NSW is public lands (mostly national parks) out of the Council's control. The State and Federal Governments need to fix the problems.

Barry McDonald