

On 16/04/2020 10:24 am, Barry Patten wrote:

> Hopefully this submission can still be accepted.

>

> Difficult to put everything into words, especially when you have fires

> in the area for 6 weeks or more, and not knowing if you are going to

> get hit or not each day.. and hoping if you did there were resources

> to help... thank god for the RFS foot soldiers and the ute brigade...

>

> Unfortunately I don't feel the same for the RFS hierarchy or NSW Govt

> Emergency services...after all didn't the RFS head keep telling us we

> had all the resources needed and then the minister goes off on

> holidays whilst we were burning ??

>

> Regards

>

> Barry Patten

>

> [REDACTED]

>

> [REDACTED]

>

Preamble:

Croobyar Rd was subjected to the bushfires from Nov 2019 to Jan 2020 after suffering the Kingiman fires in August 2018.

The Kingiman fire was the result of the NSW National Parks allowing a fire near Mt Kingiman to run until gale force westerly winds took it out of control... but this was only the second time the Morton NP in this area had been burnt/ back burned in the last 15 years.. until 2019-20.

The drought and lack of back burning then allowed the Currowan fire to run out of control in the area for weeks from Nov 26.

We fought fires in the area for the following 6 weeks initially with the support of the RFS until late Dec 2019 when we were left to our own resources.

If not for the "ute brigade" with 1000L IBCs to fight the fires and save homes, with little or no support from the RFS or NSW Fire and Rescue, more property and houses would've been lost.

As it was there was the loss of sq kilometers of bush land and initially homes in Little Forest and then the Conjola disaster when the RFS or other fire agencies were basically nowhere to be seen ... seems that Nowra and Batemans Bay were a higher priority.

Cause and Contributing Factors

Lack of Back Burning with bush land that was tinder dry and went up in flames in Nov and burnt for weeks,

Lack of resources to fight the fires .. the RFS stretched to breaking point and NSW Fire and Rescue unable to handle bush fires... town fire trucks with limited water on board and relying on fire hydrants that we don't have in the bush ...

Two NSW Fire and Rescue Trucks PLUS their 2 Command cars were sent to put out a bush fire in December at 914 Croobyar Rd and they ran out of water after about 15min and still didn't extinguished the fire .. my 1000L IBC lasted longer....and the fire trucks did not return.

Preparation and Planning

Is there a State Disaster Plan that covers this type of incident ??

If there is it certainly needs a revamp.

Why cannot the |Federal Government declare a state of disaster and send in resources.?

What is required for the |State government to declare a state of emergency/disaster and why did it take so long for this to be declared ?

There seemed an apparent lack of planning to prepare for the catastrophic fires despite a "plea" by the group of retired heads of emergency services in April to warn the government of the impending disaster...

Who in the Federal and/or State governments refused to meet with them and ignored the warnings ??

Despite claims by the RFS head at every press conference that "*we have all the resources we need*" this was patently a lie..

In Nov-Dec locally we had 15 or more fire trucks stationed at a staging area at Milton showgrounds plus a command van to try and fight the Currowan fires but by late Dec - Jan most of the resources had been withdrawn leaving virtually nothing with limited if no aerial resources and the fires were still burning.

Where were the defense forces and why did it take until early January to call them in ??

We obviously need a Civil Defense force in addition to the SES/RFS etc. and the Defense forces would seem ideally set up for this function.

A cyclone in Vanuatu and the air force is in the air in 2 days.. a hospital closed down in Northern Tasmania and the defense force medics are there in 2 days...

Catastrophic fires in Southern NSW and in Victoria and it takes 6 weeks to mobilise the navy and army forces....

Who is responsible to call out the defense forces and why did it take 6 weeks ???

Aerial Resources

Why did we only have 3 large aerial tankers when it as obvious that more resources were needed in December whereas extra aerial tankers were only arranged in early to mid-January ?

The UTE BRIGADE

As mentioned except for the ute brigade. Locals with 1000L IBCs and fire pumps then more houses/property would've been lost.

The RFS needs to acknowledge these as a valuable resource and do what they can to support and co-ordinate with the Ute brigade.

Response to the Fires

Seems that despite assurances to the contrary resources were inadequate to fight the fires.

In Nov-Dec the RFS foot soldiers were doing what they could to fight the fires between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay with the Princes highway closed for over a week and then the Kings Hwy taken out...

but Even in Dec 2019 locals on Monkey Mountain Rd Termeil called 000 and were told there were NO resources to help fight the fires and protect homes under threat.

Then on Croobyar Rd around New Year when the spectacular Saturday southerly wind change hit and set bush and grass spot fires alight at the top of Croobyar Rd a call to 000 at 7pm resulted in One fire truck arriving at midnight.... If not for the Ute brigade then 4 or more houses were lost, unfortunately acres of grass land and km of fences could not be saved.

Luckily I have no personal experience with the Conjola fire except that the rumors around town are that it was caused by the RFS setting a back burn and then leaving to go to Batemans Bay with the wind taking hold of the fire and 120 or more houses lost.... All I can say is that the day of the Conjola fire I witnessed a fire around Little Forest that had previously destroyed some houses and had not been completely extinguished re-ignite and take off along Croobyar creek towards Bulgatta flats/Conjola. .. that was the day the main power feeder lines north of Milton were taken out.

Other Matters

The Call to Leave: This as a debacle and luckily not the disaster it could've been.

Tourists were told to leave the area around new year then the fires closed the highway between Milton and Nowra ...

The closure of the highway hopefully could not be foreseen but the actions of the responsible agencies when it as closed was completely incompetent..

Tourists were told to evacuate

Then fires closed the Princes Highway between Milton and Nowra

Then the highway was closed at the North end of Milton

This resulted in a traffic jam from Milton to Batemans Bay

.. and where were the police/RMS/Council ??... nowhere to be seen..

cars were stationary on the highway for up to 18 hours or so with no water/food or information except for the locals who provided what help they could.

Why as the highway closed off at Milton with traffic allowed to bank up on the highway for 40 to 50km ????

Why were vehicles still allowed to enter Ulladulla from the south and not stopped or diverted until the highway could be re-opened.??

Where were the emergency services to provide support/water/food/information to the trapped people.??

Luckily there as not a fire to the south otherwise everyone was trapped...

Some incompetents need to lose their heads over that one...!!

Evacuation Centres

When the power as lost around new years day is it true that the Ulladulla Evacuation centre had to borrow a generator from the circus in town to keep the lights on....??

Surely if there are bush fires in the area the contingency planning and risk analysis would say that a power outage is possible or most likely... so have a stand by generator available or if the Civic Centre is a designated evacuation centre then have a stand-by genset installed and in place..

Why did not the Ulladulla Evacuation Center not have a stand-by genset ???

Then there were calls for people to drop in bean bags or help cooking meals at the Centre...

why cannot the defense forces or civil defense force to step in yet again... stretcher beds and the army mobile kitchens and cooks ?? why do we have to continually rely on volunteers to provide the support ?

Power Outage

When the power was lost around new year's eve the response from Endeavor energy was that the power could be out for up to a week... even before they had checked the lines to see the damage...causing much more distress than as needed....

the result as a run on the supermarkets which could not open and petrol stations which could not pump fuel..

Endeavor Energy needs to explain why they gave out inaccurate information regarding the outage until they could verify the damage.

Why is there not a contingency plan to have generators on stand-bye for this eventuality ??...

Fires had been burning for over 6 weeks and surely the risk analysis would say that power lines/supply were most likely under threat....

What people want is food, fuel, and communications... with no power there is none of these....stand-by gensets could get these "essential" services up and running quickly.

Luckily it only took 2 or so days for the power to be restored in our area..

Communications

Once the power went out we lost the NBN and so internet connection at the house... the wireless towers then went out, the mobile phone towers did not last much longer and the phone land line lasted for 6 to 8 hours ... but off course with no broadband we still had no internet. .. BUY WE were continually told to check online for emergency warnings or check the RFS Fires Near Me...

??? HOW ... when there is no NBN and no phone service ????

Again stand-by power was needed but no-where to be seen