



## Your details

Mr

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**Title**

**First name**

bruce

**Last name**

summerell

## 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

**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**

My Brother and I fought the fire fronts on New Years eve between 2am to 6pm that day to save three houses, 7 sheds and dozens of items of farm equipemnt on the family farm which our father began dairying on in the late 1960's and became a beef farm in 2006 when he retired from milking.

The only infrastructure we only lost were fencing, poly pipe and a few small farm equipment items, our main fire fighting weapon was 140 megalitre dam with a diesel powered irrigation system, which allowed us to slow the main fire front of the Badja forest fire from the South and West enough we could fight the fronts from the North, East and South East later that day with a 1000L fire cart.

The 140 megalitre dam was one of the last of it's size to be built in this area in the 1990's, since then building dams of this size is so prohibative due to legislation that i do not know of any dams been built of this size in this area since then.

The size of this dam meant that we could irrigate during the drought preceding the fires and we still had plenty of water on the farm to fight the fires and irrigate after the fires to try to provide pasture for our cattle and the neighbours sheep. Additionally late on the afternoon of the 10th of January 2020 Erikson Air Crane 730 filled up several times from the 140 Megalitre dam to put out an outbreak of fire along Hore Lacey road Verona NSW.

This dam has proven to be the best asset on the farm and asset to the area.

Having spoken to neighbours and friends who also fought the same fires, it appears as if the 140 megalitre dam and irrigation had some effects on the fire in our favour;

- the obvious one is that we had plenty of water to fight the fires even though were in the grips of a drought when most other dams in the area had dried up.

- the irrigated pasture although not thriving were green enough to not burn and provide refuge for the livestock and probably other native animals. I noted we had bird life around the farm the next day, where other people said they heard or saw nothing for weeks.

- the irrigated pastures and the 700 metres of irrigation front going for 12 hours none stop changed the water vapour content of the air and took the temper out of the fire, my brother and i didn't seem to have expereined the severe heat and wind gusts that others experienced from the South and West.

- The irrigation system is set up so we can fill a samller dam which gravity feeds to water troughs all over that farm which meant we didn't have to travel too far to refill our water cart, which meant we spent more time fighting fires than refilling, about 12 times in all we refilled the cart.

- The body of water in the dam became an obstical to the fire front and probably took some temper out of the fire as well.

- The Dam has also become a nursery for native water life, like native crustations and small native fish- during the drought many of these native shrimp and fish in the creeks and smaller dams have died off and any surviving ones may have been killed off if we had a massive rain event that would have washed ash and sediment into the creeks and river, in situations like this bigger dams become a refuge that would replenish creeks and rivers when the dam over spills after creeks and rivers have recovered.

Bigger farm dams become a national asset in allowing fire fighting equipement like the Erikson Air Cranes to source water closer to fire outbreaks.

## 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

-Extended dry periods.  
- cleanliness around houses - Most homes in our area that burned I noticed, were becuase of ethier native vegetation like gum tree too close to the house or allowing rubbish and combustables to build up around the houses. Houses that were not defended, tended to survive if they were kept tidy.

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

Main points - preparation long before a drought - We had been preparing since 2010, the irrigation system had been set up keep water outlets valves wet, and the irrigation system is run nearly

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every winter and summer for maintenance or irrigation purposes.

- Before the fires we had been irrigating pastures since October 2019, intentionally we irrigated paddocks that would protect the farm from a potentially South Westerly fire, as similar to the 1952 fires as my father had experienced.
- Have fire plans in place - I guess that about 80% of our plan was carried out, the other 20% got forgotten or overlooked in the mayhem of that day. For my wife and I the decision was made very early that I would stay and defend and my wife would evacuate, changes to our fire plan is now I know that our house is very defensible and my wife will not evacuate as the the evacuation point of Bermagui came under threat from the Badja Forest road fire as well.
- Have back up fire fighting units - We had a main 1000litre fire fighting cart, but also back up unit, a tractor mounted spray unit normally used for crop spraying but it has a capacity of 300litres, it became very useful when we had a breakdown on the main cart.
- Expect communications to fail, I knew that the mobile phone towers have about 6 hours battery life once the power fails, I always thought that landline would be more reliable than mobile but I was wrong, the landline was burnt out in the first hour of the fire, we could still communicate by mobile phone up till about 12pm that day. I would like to take the opportunity to praise Telstra on how well the system worked in our area, even after 12pm I could still find spots on the farm where I could send a text.
- Expect power to fail - have back up generators to at least run your fridges, our house is set up with gravity feed water so we don't need power or pumps to keep water flowing although it is reduced pressure, Our house can function without power, eg showering, drinking water, gas for cooking.
- Gutter bungs were used to keep gutters wet and stop ember attack into the roof of the house, although we did not seem to get ember attack like others, possibly because the irrigations system took the temper out of the fire front.
- Burning off - we found it hard to carry out burning off in the previous months because you have to seek approval from RFS and then the conditions were not right and then the approval lapsed,. Some form of online notification of a planned burn would be good to take advantage of the right conditions at the time.
- Short grass - allowing stock access to everywhere on the farm meant grass was short, and at the back of our farm, shrubs that burnt from embers didn't continue because the grass was short. Putting out grass fire was easy with little water but putting out hollow trees was a waste of water and time, unless it was a tree of significance then we would attempt to save it.

**1.3 Response to bushfires**

-Allow more larger size farm dams to be built, that will still have water after a drought and encourage irrigation systems that could be used as a front against fire fronts, from my understanding you can only build a 5 megalitre dam with out approval, and dams over that size are discouraged by legislation, most 5 megalitre dams in this area were dry before December 2019, so there was a lack of fire fighting water. These larger dams also become refuges for native water life during droughts.

- Online form to RFS notify of burning off, so if the conditions are right, you can burn straight away.

**1.4 Any other matters**

I'm happy to be contacted by phone for more details - 0428938522

**Supporting documents or images**

**Attach files**

- 10th Jan 2020.JPG

- veiw of irrigation front from neighbours.JPG
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