



Title	Ms
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I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>I lived in Dargan for 26 years. The threat of fire in an area such as this is something you live with, year after year. 2019 was not the first time fire threatened our property, but on 21st December 2019, the worst happened and our home was destroyed. The lead up to the actual fire front reaching Dargan was two months of smoke and fear. Watching the Gosper's Mountain fire grow and advance ever closer left a feeling of helplessness and doom. In the end we were surrounded by the fires from all directions and it was inevitable that some in the Bell/Dargan/Clarence area would be impacted.</p> <p>Having lived in a bushland setting for so long, we were no strangers to fire and to drought - but I had never seen anything like 2019. The native flora was dying through lack of water. The eucalypts, the bottle brushes, the waratahs are natural to the area and cope with periods of dryness. This was different. The</p>

bush crackled with dead undergrowth and it was inevitable that if fire went through the area, it would do so in the most devastating way.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

The long period of dryness preceding the fires meant the bush was vulnerable in the worst way to any lightning strikes. The longer, hotter bushfire seasons of the past years in my opinion has meant that the window of opportunity to burn back has been getting smaller and smaller. I am convinced that climate change in Australia is a major contributor to this season's horror fires. I also believe that the RFS is underfunded and under resourced, impacting their ability to carry out back burning operations when the weather was favourable.

1.2 Preparation and planning

We have seen countless campaigns through this fire season where RFS units have been reduced to asking the public for money to resource their units. The need for essential equipment such as face masks, should be met by government and not left to pleas on social media. For the whole of 2019 we were warned that the bushfire season ahead could be a horror one. Why then, were RFS units not better equipped by government for the task ahead? The Dargan area is extremely vulnerable to fire and not all residents take adequate precautions to protect their properties. I have seen firewood piled up against timber houses in some cases. A yearly inspection by council before the fire season in such areas might help to educate residents about the perils of such practices. Yes, this costs money - but how much have the fires cost this year after the fact? How much better to put that money into preventative action.

1.3 Response to bushfires

In relation to communication, I have nothing but praise for my local Clarence/Dargan brigade. They kept us informed as well as they could about local conditions and risks. The RFS Fires Near Me app was useful but obviously became over loaded at times and appeared less than accurate. I was receiving so many repeated warnings at one stage, I had to turn it off. I suggest some funding go towards improving the stability of the app as it is so vital in a fire situation. The phone texts to warn of emergency conditions were essential information and allowed me to evacuate my home in time. It seems like the communications tower at Clarence ceased working and I wondered why these towers in bushfire prone areas aren't protected more thoroughly.

1.4 Any other matters

Finally just a word about the media. Social media had the best and the worst of information. For up to date local information, it could be really helpful - but it was also full of scaremongering and inaccuracies. This is to be expected, however mainstream media were no better in some cases. In more than one instance I saw the names Bell, Dargan and Clarence used interchangeably. These are distinct communities and to respect the trauma residents are experiencing, media should at the very least ensure they have the correct community name.

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