



## Your details

Miss

Title

First name

Catherine

Last name

Woolnough

## 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

Living in Sydney, I breathed and choked on thick smog through summer. Will find out in a decade or so if this has caused lung cancer. Read horrific stories of billion plus animals who died in these fires.

## 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

Rising carbon emissions caused by human activity has lead to increased drought and higher temperatures. Bush-fire risk in Australia should be taken into account and action to reduce emissions should be front of policy and direction for all levels of

Government in Australia. Warmer winters and drought has reduced the time available for hazard reduction burns.

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## 1.2 Preparation and planning

A lack of action, preparation and planning to mitigate climate change over the past decade has increased the severity of these fires.

There were reports in the media of the Federal government refusing to meet with the RFS to discuss the resources, staffing and equipment required for what the RFS predicted would be a large increase in bush fire season (longevity and intensity). This is unacceptable.

The RFS 10/50 clearing code was touted as a bush fire risk reduction strategy. However the RFS 10/50 clearing code has caused significant unintended consequences including impacts from reduced tree canopy cover. Much of the loss of tree canopy cover is in suburban areas which have never seen a bush fire. Loss of trees which are carbon sinks only increases the effects of rising carbon dioxide emissions, increases effects of climate change and increases temperatures leading to more drought and bush fire risk and intensity. Many trees have been removed for reasons to do with renovations or seeking a better view, or simply to avoid tree-related gardening. Removal of these trees was not done with intentions to reduce bush fire risk.

Vegetation should be assessed by experts from or accredited by the RFS to determine the bush fire risk, rather than having the responsibility assigned to landowners. Self assessment is still too complex for landowners to determine whether clearance is legal and whether valuable environmental assets are being unknowingly removed. The average home owner is likely to be able to adequately assess or even try to assess environmental considerations.

The practice described in the 10/50 code of removing all trees within 10 metres and all vegetation within 50 metres of a habitable dwelling (10/50) is inconsistent with many recommendations of the recently gazetted Planning for Bushfire Protection 2018. PBP recommends clearing on the hazard side of a dwelling, 10/50 permits it on all four sides of a dwelling. I strongly suggest that the 10/50 code be radically amended to include such practices outlined in the PBP.

The bush fires of the 2019-2020 were particularly intense, jumping across tree tops and re-burning areas which had been previously burnt. In many of these cases, due to severe to catastrophic intensity of the fires, no amount of tree or vegetation clearing could ameliorate. Spot fires were starting many kilometres ahead of the fire front. In these cases, exposed homes were even more at risk if not sheltered by tree or shrub cover (removed under the 10/50 code).

Native vegetation should not be cleared without a well-informed assessment, particularly if it is only a low bush fire risk. The environment should be a key consideration in managing bush fires. Many homeowners are unlikely to know what threatened species, habitat values and other environmental matters should be considered. Clearing into National Parks and council land for asset protection to bordering properties must not be allowed. The area of public land that would be cleared would not be acceptable. Habitat connectivity would be impacted. Bush fire hazards and any tree removal should be done with advice from the RFS and/or qualified/accredited professionals. It should not be left up to home owners.

Additionally vegetation management should be promoted as just one of a suite of bush fire prevention measures, and not as the only solution. Clearly, as demonstrated by the recent summer fires, vegetation clearing to stop fires does not work, if anything, it

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makes the situation worse through effects on climate change and creating a lack of physical protection to the house. The 10/50 mapping tool is inaccurate with buffer zones not aligning with borders of vegetation hazards. Numerous properties are included in the entitlement areas that should not be included. The entitlement areas apply even if only one or two square metres of a property are within a buffer zone. This allows unnecessary tree removal as well as significantly increasing building costs. There should be a mechanism whereby individuals can get incorrectly assessed properties removed from the entitlement areas, making alterations or new homes less costly.

Increasing tree canopy is a key objective of the Greater Sydney Commission. Many local Councils have also adopted this objective including the Hills Shire Council. The 10/50 clearing code is in direct contravention to objectives to increase tree canopy, and to any strategies to mitigate climate change and to subsequently reduce bush fire risk.

A 5-year Statutory Review of the 10/50 code has not yet taken place. A formal review was commenced following only two months of the scheme's operation, rather than two years operation as was the original intent of the legislation. This demonstrates a further lack of planning for these fires. A formal review of the RFS 10/50 Clearing Code should be undertaken, separate to this Bushfire Inquiry.

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### **1.3 Response to bushfires**

Reports in the media of Government dropping of food for surviving wildlife were appreciated. Drops should have continued until such time that evidence was obtained to indicate further assistance was not needed. more funds should have been provided quickly and easily to wild life hospitals and carers. more funds should now be provided to bushland management and re-generation.

Reports in the media of the Prime Minister taking an overseas holiday during the crisis of the bush fires were not appreciated by the Australian people, better leadership should have been shown by the Government.

## **Supporting documents or images**

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