



## Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Cathy

Last name

Gairn

## Submission details

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

Your story

We were aware of the Dunns road fire and had prepared our property as best we could. We had a phone call from one of our neighbours at 2.30am on December 31st 2019 to say get prepared as the fire was getting closer. We received a text from the rural fire service at 4 am to prepare to leave and a neighbour came to check on us at 4.15am. We were as prepared as we could have been at that time.

We were at our neighbours property at 6.30 am attempting to get things out of his house when the fire surrounded our own property. With neighbours fleeing from their house as it had already been lost. We couldn't get back to our house as the smoke was so thick and the fire was coming from each direction. We drove towards town and waited for about 40 minutes and then returned home to find that the fire had burn't out our paddocks and approximately 15% of our vineyard. We were blessed the wind had changed direction as it came closer to our house and buildings. There were spot fires and neighbours

helped to put them out as well as trying to protect their own properties. There was no sign of any fire trucks. I had already been through the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, my house being the only one that survived in the whole street and I am absolutely terrified of fires since then. We are extremely grateful to our neighbours for everything they did but we are very disappointed in the lack of communication after that day during the town evacuation period. However we are very grateful for the support from local, state and federal governments for their support once things settled down. Let's hope we can all learn and grow from this experience.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

I believe that how ever this fire started the response to the Ellerslie Rd /Yavern creek / Dunns rd Fire was underestimated. This fire was contained but not under control and could have been either put out or the severity greatly lessened had air support been given. I understand from the media that the NSW coast was also under threat but clearly we are under resourced. The maintenance of the state forests also played a huge part in fuelling this fire. The management of road side clearings and lessening the fuel load has been ignored by our council for years. I believe that whilst every one did what they thought was the right thing at the time there were many contributing factors that could have made a major difference in managing this fire.

### 1.2 Preparation and planning

We had personally activated our bushfire management plan, we had prepared around our house, farm and business to lessen the fuel load and prepare for the worst. We had also taken steps to manage our neighbouring property as they were away on holidays. Our biggest mistake was not having enough fuel for our generator on hand so that we could have been more self sufficient once the fire had passed. We had no idea that we would have been without power or communications for over 3 weeks.

### 1.3 Response to bushfires

We had no response from any fire trucks, local RFS until 3 days after we were burnt. Our neighbours helped put out our fires. Our farm and vineyard was partially burnt we had spot fires all around our house and cellar door.

### 1.4 Any other matters

I feel the management after the fires was very poorly managed. The local Police were amazing but the relieving police staff that was bought in were very unreasonable. We were asked by the local police to attend the town meetings, only after attending our road was blocked and I was unable to return home. My husband was still at home, we had no communications, power and no way of informing him of the situation. In the end with local knowledge I drove though burnt out paddocks and trees down to get home. We then made the decision not to go anywhere alone. Not only we were both terrified we felt very unsupported by decisions changing all the time with no way of knowing. Our rd ( ) was already burnt and the road block was keeping us in our burnt area and not allowing us to get to town or we couldn't come back. Each time the shift change with the police the decision was changed. Once the fuel for our generator ran out we could not even get to town to buy some. Eventually the local police dropped some out. I believe number plates should have been recorded at the road blocks to allow us back home. We had no

idea what had happened to our family. We couldn't get to them and they couldn't get to us.

### **Supporting documents or images**

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