



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Christina

Last name

Grant-McNaught

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A primary producer

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

I am a 3rd generation landholder of this fire affected property in north east NSW which burnt in early December, 2019. I am 54 years old and there have been 3 significant bushfires during my lifetime. Over the course of this time we have always successfully defended our major infrastructure and did so this fire as well. We do this by being prepared to work long hours, do our backburns in the still of the night, and using our cleared fence lines to burn back from. A few years ago authorities informed us our fence lines were too wide. I would argue that they are not wide enough as we had hectic moments when the fire rushed up a gully and became a crown fire, thereby spotting over. My husband and I alone saved the house valley which is about 500 acres, but had to let another

9,500 acres burn as we had no support.

On the most hectic day the useless RFS helicopter flew over and WATCHED us trying to stop a raging fire from threatening the houses. It then flew off and reported nothing to anyone as no one tried to contact us to find out if we survived. We were also feeding cattle in drought conditions at the time.

We have properties at both ends of the [REDACTED] and both were under threat at the same time so we had to leave our 18 year old daughter who had just finished school to manage one while we were stranded with the road closed and on fire for 2 weeks. We ran out of most food, and upon asking the RFS if the joy flight helicopter could do a drop we were told it couldn't. Obviously the South Coast had more superior treatment later, but they were closer to Canberra.

That helicopter was the biggest waste of taxpayers money I have ever seen. The up dates on the rfs website were wrong and always too late being up dated. We couldn't see the fire for the thick smoke for WEEKS and could really have used accurate maps to help us plan our defence as we had 2 major fires merge in our property and ended up having to fight it on 3 fronts at separate times. Alone.

I keep mentioning Alone because the fleeting help we were offered was inconsistent and crazy. Although we had ploughed and used our smaller bulldozer to make dirt breaks Forestry then sent out first a Skidder to widen the tracks which we then performed our first back burn from ...alone. We had to as the main fire was only 1km away at the time and conditions were quite still. Forestry turned up 2 days later, horrified that we had done it Alone, but on the day they turned up it was hot and windy and of course by then all our infrastructure would have been burnt if we hadn't taken the initiative. They then sent us a D8 to put in some more breaks....but then failed to turn up for another 2 days while the dozer driver informed us he wasn't allowed to operate without Forestry there so the dozer sat around and the driver was paid to do nothing. He was really frustrated and said, I quote, "we don't put fires out. We just follow them." Which was exactly the case. Everything was done too late and sometimes the stupidity was gobsmacking.

They opened up tracks through timbered country and called them "breaks". It is NOT a break unless it has been burnt back from. Not one of them held which is not surprising as none of them were patrolled. We had a lot of useful tracks cleared at taxpayers expense so I shouldn't complain but it was such a terribly wasteful of time and resources and utterly useless towards stopping or slowing the fire. Everything burnt except for the areas my husband and I saved.

It was insulting to see all the machinery going around in circles when seemingly there had never been money enough previously to maintain fire trails. The Bicentennial Trail runs along Grants Fire Trail through the middle of our country but the trail hasn't been funded for 15 to 20 years and we maintain it ourselves. It is a Private trail these days we're told, so not open to the public as we would be liable if someone was hurt using it. The NSW government undertakes to insure the National Trail users. So the rfs bureaucrats then sent any amount of machinery along it and drove up and down it, latterly realising what a useful trail it is. I would like to point out that at that time it was only still useable because we maintain it at personal expense. Most of the other fire trails around here went to rack and ruin many years ago and some of them used to be important breaks.

I would definitely suggest in future that if something like this were to happen again then the Military should run it. Fighting a fire like that is like fighting a war. You can't go home because it's time to knock off. You have to do what needs doing. The volunteers for the RFS aren't up to the task and the number of times fires got out of control because the boss sent the boys home is disappointing to say the least. It's not a boys club. Even Forestry employees were frustrated at being told they had to leave when a

few more hours on the job was the difference between success and failure. This needs addressing and bushfires need to be co-ordinated with military precision.

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

Mis management of National Parks. We have 20km boundary with them and they are DIFFICULT to work with when we control burn. (Something we do regularly and them, not at all) The Park burnt FIERCELY in comparison to our grazed, managed, control burnt property. Their wildlife would be glad they could come over to our side of the fence

1.2 Preparation and planning

Locking the Stable Door after the Horse has Bolted. There had been no funding for fire trails for years. Several which were once used successfully as breaks are now overgrown and useless. Planning was poor and mistakes were made. Response was always too slow or silly

1.3 Response to bushfires

Volunteers are not up to the task. Teams were sent home when their shift was over instead of finishing a job. If you light a backburn and don't manage it, all you have done is light a new fire. This happened a lot. Machinery went around in circles with lack of co-ordination between Areas. In our case, unfortunately we came under 2 different areas of command and apart from trying to out do each other they didn't communicate between themselves at all, resulting in at least one instance of both areas sending in machinery to do the same job

1.4 Any other matters

Please consider training an arm of the military to deal with this should it ever happen again. A bushfire is like fighting a war and is serious business. There is no room for silly, costly mistakes. Bushfires don't go home for the evening like the volunteers do.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

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- BF60CFA0-04E5-4DE8-9337-433235D8F1D5.jpeg
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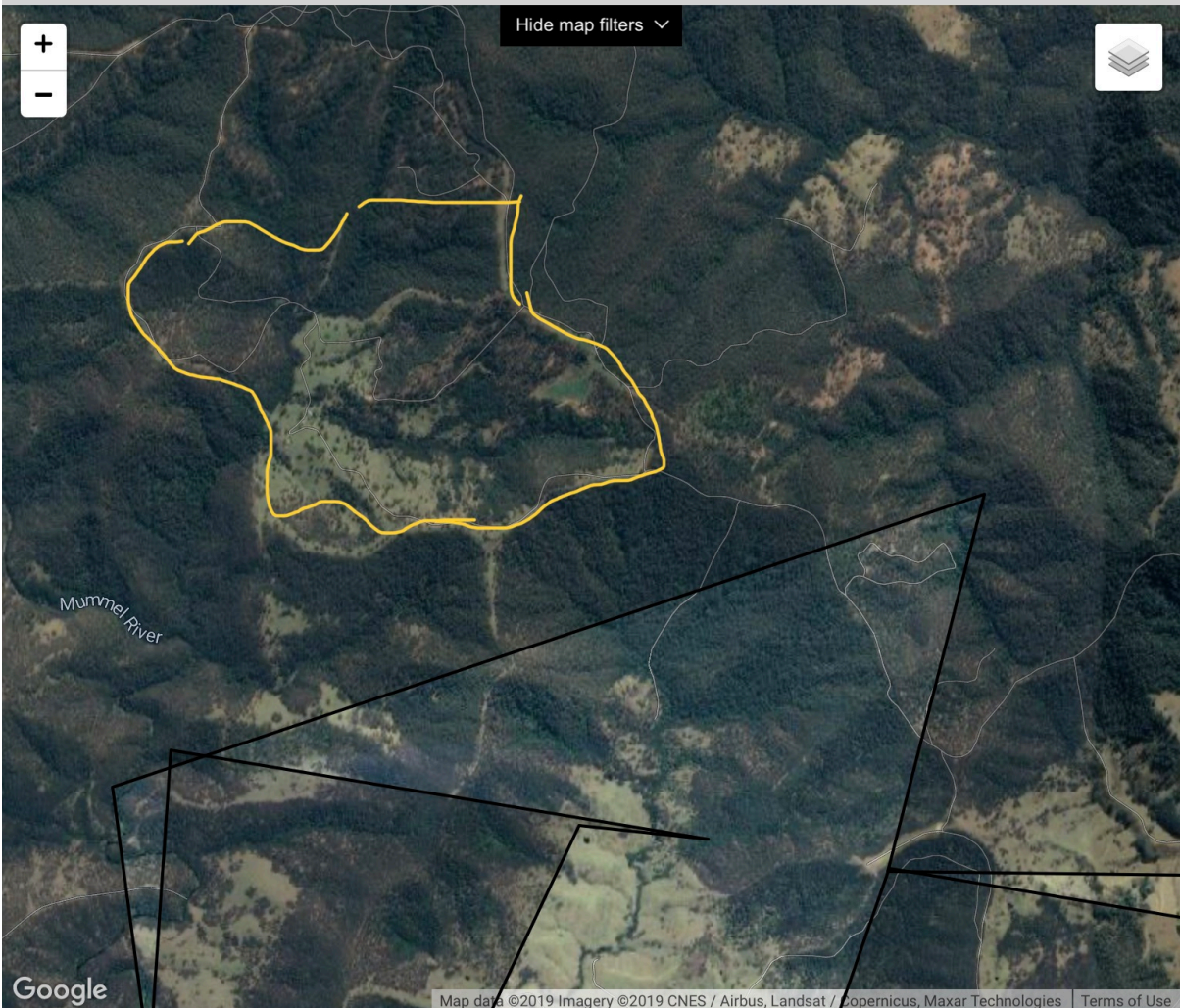
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