



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Christine

Last name

Hill

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

My family and I are previous residents of Dargan for 23 years. On December 21st the Gospers mtn fire raged through Clarence , Dargan , Bell, Newnes junction . The fire hit us from 3 directions or more , as we personally had predicted . We know the topography , read weather in detail and knew the current fire season was dangerous .

We have always explored by bushwalking a lot of Wollemi Np and surrounding areas and we study and read the map. So during Gospers, from the start we were actively interpreting where the fire could go in the landscape . We were studying it's movement over the whole period of the fire . Many times we would drive up to near the Monkey creek cafe at Dargan, like many others to check latest position, flare ups. We also spoke to our friends in Npws who were working on the fire , and our

neighbours who were volunteers with our rfs . Of huge concern was to see the fire move from the Glow worm tunnel crossing Carne Creek to sunny side, blackfellows hands to Angus place- always moving south along western plateau escarpment arriving Marangaroo area in the hills above lithgow on a day when the wind changed to extreme nw gusty winds hit temperatures driving the fire , as predicted into Lithgow.

The whole period Gaspers we felt that there was not enough information and we knew it was coming . Why wasn't this fire stopped as soon as it had started ?

We kept hearing and seeing on fires near me news about a Hawksberry , ruined castle fire .. etc Meanwhile thus sleeping dragon was getting bigger and bigger on our doorstep .

The whole period was extremely stressful and all consuming . We kept a level head and knew what to do and got busy preparing in between working still and selling a house . Massive tip trips to remove ground fuel and thinning of bush near the house on fire shed and clean up house zone . We have been informed about fire prep for many years . We have even been in many eco tours locally looking at Bal rated houses . We have been to fire conference to ask the latest . And have read many articles in magazines about fire preparation . We have closed area under house with colourbond , made homemade shutters and tried to increase our water catchment and tank storage . Recently we spent borrowed money to fix the driveway and entrance so RFS trucks can get in .. and access tanks and pump . We have some spent money on earthworks to build an access track so vehicles can get further up property . Including tree lopping and earthworks to clear an access boundary track to back of property to old fire trail so RFS can get up and out .

Basically we felt prepared and had retro fitted house fire protection as much as could within our small budget.

When Gaspers came through our community it was a huge shock. The devastation was huge and many properties were lost . It has affected our community .. post fire people are exhausted, sad , but many resilient . The community feels a bit empty now and the bush totally destroyed but coming back . Not the same now .

We were one of the lucky ones . If it wasn't for RFS protecting our property and locals who patrolled last fire , it may have burnt . Others nearby the fire hit hard .

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

Long term Effects of Climate change has been predicted for many years . Drier climate , hotter temperatures and more fires .

Lack of sensitive control burning ... cool burning at the favourable times . Lack of resources and funding to land managers , like National parks to undertake fire management regimes effectively on consistent basis and at the right time . (climate change has hindered this)

Question mark on how other private , government and public lands are managed ? Especially around Lithgow area (forestry , mining , land reserves , crown land , etc) no one seems to work

together for conservation , people and fire management .
 Need better co ordinated natural areas management all over
 state and policing during extreme fire days . (Dargan Creek
 Reserve remained open to the public right up to when the fire
 came ?... WHY? Dargan and Newnes plateau areas lack any
 type of consistent management ! It's been lawless in these areas
 fir a long time, sadly .
 The hills surrounding Lithgow are they managed to keep fuel
 loads under control . Is there any liaison with local indigenous
 groups ?
 Our Local RFS would appreciate more support and funding,
 given the vast natural areas they work in , Including Wollemi and
 Gardens of Stone Np and surrounding towns and small bush
 communities . (area attracts many people during summer who
 visit Dargan Dam cliffs , and Newnes Plateau)
 They are only a small RFS as population in area is small.
 Most fire brigades in rural communities are small . They need
 more support .
 I am very concerned about LACK OF Air support for
 NPWS and others to tackle fires ASAP when they started.
 If we had more aircraft ready by a March 2019 as a country we
 could have been more prepared for the predicted unprecedented
 season .
 Australia was ill prepared in resources to tackle the scale of fires
 and the emergency, that obvious .

1.2 Preparation and planning

Australia was ill prepared in resources to tackle the wide scale
 fires and emergency !

Not enough planning and preparation in time .
 Funding cut to National parks ... And staff with good fire
 experience and knowledge made redundant ... made 2019
 difficult ... and current staff working extremely long days and
 travelling long distances to regional fire areas before and after
 shift when tired , same with RFS and all involved .

Lithgow appeared to not be prepared . Most residents did not
 think a fire was going to come right into town.

Some Dargan residents who stayed did not realise the predicted
 paths and behaviour and ferocity of the fires . RFS meetings
 were really good but almost too late . People need to understand
 the landscape , be educated about possible scenarios in their
 area , so they can make the right decisions.
 Community education about preparation on bush properties ...
 good access , water tanks near driveway so rfs can refill . Latest
 on retro fitting house so protected. (we have homemade metal
 shutters and tanks easily accessible and circular driveway can
 take trucks . (especially if cannot afford to change house to
 flame zone .fully .\$\$\$\$ Most people cannot in afford much in rural
 Australia and bush properties .

Dargan has a gazetted fire trail on its western side which RFS
 can manage . In 2013 fire another fire trail was blazed in on
 eastern dude if ridge to do a back burn to protect community from
 2013 fire . Three days before Gaspers hit ourselves and one
 other resident with a bulldozer cleared it all , by dozer, handsaws
 and loppers- in dry 30 degree weather. At same time liasibg
 desperately with some property owners so we could get through
 and make the trail it was usable again fir our threatening
 emergency !, Our urgent goal was to re open this trail
 desperately, so our local RFS could have escape routes out of
 properties or valley view Rd .. so Dargan had a loop road around
 it fir safety and patrolling post fire.

I recommend that all bush and rural communities especially in
 our area have help with setting up these fire management trails
 that loop around community and RFS and private owners can
 access grants to put gates etc and local RFS community liaison
 officers can educate private owners about importance of this trail
 if it goes through their property . The RFS and owner have key .

This fire trail stopped Hartley fire that came later in night from getting further into the back of our property . Local RFS members, including our neighbour used this loop trail to put out spot fires after both fires had been through .

I recommend that people are educated on how to manage a bush property and clear sensitive and ecological way . Allowing for house zone , using gravel and hard surfaces and fire retardant shrubs fir landscaping . And further out allow fir cool burns and manual thinning , keeping some ground covers , grasses (cut in fire season) and occasional trees with space . Too many people destroy complete habitat and layering of areas .

Education on real water supply needed would be useful fir some so people can plan .

We were planning to allow fir a 50 ,000 litre fire fighting only tank . All costs . Questions still go around post fire , whether concrete tanks are better than those rated steel tanks? More clear information needs to be accessible to all types of people living on bush properties on flame zone products . And Bal ratings we were informed however a lot in Dargan were not .

Only 2 years against I tried to find out latest regs on Flame zone because we were going to sell , and My enquiry got bounced between Lithgow Council, lithgow RFS control centre and I eventually ended up talking eventually to some expert in the city . I felt quite frustrated that I could not get any clear answers locally ?

In regards to our fire plan we prepared property as well as can and decided to bolt as we are not trained RFS abd we knew this fire was going to be fierce and dangerous .

We found there was know information from Lithgow if where we could go ? Also no places that could accept our pet rabbit. .

As previously mentioned .. we had been watching this fire for a few months move closer and we also knew the landscape and history of fire movement in the area . We decided to escape to Bathurst , as knew Lithgow would be hit and us . We also could predict Grose valley fire would close roads east and Gospers west . Not everyone seemed to have this awareness ..especially if roads getting blocked . If more resources support abd aircraft were available to get Mt Wilson fire controlled and then concurrent a Grose valley fire and , of course Gospers , under control In early stages then communities would not have been dangerously isolated including our local and regional RFS crews .. it's the same story down the south coast .. RFS and other emergency personal dud during fires put themselves at extreme risk in parts . A tanker ran out of water in our street .

We also need to address location of fire sheds. Or create better safe zones . Dargan RFS and communities were stuck at the shed while fire moved through . Just as well ..really .This was our safe zone which was amazing . However there is a huge distance from Clarence to Dargan by one narrow road ... and then to Bell .

Let's use roadways as firebreaks in some areas And manage these . Even valley view Rd verges could be widened so street is safer fire . Theses areas are often fur pier lines anyway . Just slash areas and conserve native grasses .

1.3 Response to bushfires

Found response too slow ...Country did not seem prepared . North coast was already seeing chaos !

We needed to get on top of Gospers when it started knowing the landscape ..

fires near me .. was classified as Hawksberry region .. this seemed to us as not clear and detailed enough . It was hard at times to really find out what was really happening on the western and south flank and prepare .

Overall the response to fires particularly by our local RFS and regional was amazing ! Credit to everyone . Our house was saved by Rfs from Oberon , Bathurst and others in tge region . We cannot thank them enough . My neighbour Karen worked many all nighters and Bob on the radio . Some of our RFS lost

their houses because they were protecting property and later people at the fire shed at Clarence .
 Also my friends in National parks worked so hard to complete successful backburns to protect species like the koala in the Black Range and property . Lots of people are heroes .
 However we need more integrated support from all agencies involved with clear roles , policies and funding .
 More emergency response teams to deal with climate change events . Incorporating the army to help with trained up personnel to deal with fires .

Fires Near Me and text alerts and community education and liaison works well .

1.4 Any other matters

Recommend setting up an emergency response centre at Lithgow .. with trained very experienced personnel and required resources to tackle fires in the Greater Blue Mountains world Heritage area . Work in conjunction with all land managers in region and Hawksberry region etc to east .
 Work in conjunction with a National parks .
 More staffing for National parks and councils , forestry fire management . Including local indigenous and national indigenous reps .
 Train up in Lithgow and other regional emergency base centres ... youth .. indigenous youth .. traineeships ... Have PYCC work together with them .
 Lithgow youth need work and focus so do youth in many other regional towns near our forested areas . Lithgow needs an injection of many diverse work opportunities .
 We need to set up an aircraft base in areas west of the great divide. Especially not far from our National parks , so fires can be managed straight away especially in Lithgow area as it's so predictable where fires move and end up ...lithgow .. Oakley park , the vale , Clarence , Dargan , Bell ,Grose Valley , Hartley , mt Wilson , Bells line Rd areas ..STOP IT AT THE SOURCE.History has shown the paths of fires . Dargan recently had a fire from lithgow in 2013 . Dargan and Clarence were threatened from Newnes Plateau in 1997 .

There is great concern on the amount of species lost during these fires also . Very concerning for our threatened species . In Dargan and region where we have lived for 23 years we know there are many endangered species living or moving through area from National park areas . On our property alone which was burnt we have had wallabies , black cockatoos , barking owls , sooty owl , powerful owl , many bats lizards and frogs , lyrebirds , Wonga pigeons , quail thrush , gang gang cockatoos , crimson rosellas hang around or pass through . This list of flora and fauna goes on... My concern is their future if we don't act now and address climate change and future fires . Our bush will change after this fire ..

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- 9EDB98D6-D3D4-4F63-84C4-4E74C9B53B55.jpeg
- DC60474C-07F8-4223-B578-480C4C6AB8A3.jpeg



