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I am making this submission as	Emergency services
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>My fire fighting experience is 32 years as a volunteer firefighter in Lithgow to rank of Captain. 21 years as a remote area fire fighter with National Parks and Wildlife Service to rank of Divisional Commander/Operations Officer/Air Base Manager. Three things stood out to me this year compared to other years. The dryness of the fuels and complete lack of rainfall, the almost constant westerly winds, the size of the wildfires in the north of the state and Queensland in spring and knowing without rain it was going to be a long season until rain historically started falling when the wet season up north started in late December/January. Hazard reduction burning went straight into Wildfire suppression for me in spring 2019 through to March 2020. We had some good wins locally as the storms started fires, some remote area and some vehicle accessible. But with the amount of fires in the state I could see resources were already becoming fully committed and risk assessments would determine who received the limited resources. I saw strategies that in the past would have contained</p>
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a fires spread fail because of a lack of enough highly experienced trained fire fighters in all roles and in some cases fire fighting appliances (both types of tankers and aircraft) being overwhelmed by the amount of fires and there size. It was a hard time seeing the next lot of hazardous fire weather building in the forcast models and knowing how overwhelmed fire fighting resources where. All agencies really excelled this time and worked well together in my experiences and achieved the best outcome possible in some really challenging situations.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

The dryness of the fuels and complete lack of rainfall, the almost constant westerly winds, the size of the wildfires in the north of the state and Queensland in spring. Too many ignitions for the available resources and the difficulty in controlling the fires under these conditions. Limitations on the hours available by volunteer fire fighters in NSW to fight fires and attend work commitments.

1.2 Preparation and planning

A lack of hazard reduction treatments being carried out on Council,Crown and private lands be it mechanical or burning especially in the Strategic Fire Advantage Zones and Asset Protection Zones adjacent to assets. An example is my RFS brigade has complete zero hazard reduction burning in our operational area in the last three years although we have a huge bush land urban interface of the Lithgow township of Council ,Crown and private land. I put this down to a volunteer organisation that lacks the resources to get the work done. The volunteers do not have the available time required to implement the works required. The district office will always say we are here to help you. My opinion is that each brigade needs a certain amount of "Retained Officers" and volunteers to enable Brigades to meet the expectation of the Rural fire Service. This would mean increased accountability. Tasks would be assigned and the works needed would be carried out. This is a real problem that exists in many Rural Fire Brigades across the state

1.3 Response to bushfires

In regards to my RFS volunteer role I think we have good equipment, resources and facilities. I find it difficult at times to have a crew respond due to increasing work commitment and the increased amount of non bush fire related incident calls the RFS now attends. "The Retained Fire Fighter" would help alleviate this as it does in the NSW Fire and Rescue Model. The GRN radio network still has a lot of black spots but I did see further funding has been allocated to address this issue. Remote Area Fire Fighting and Fire line tree felling tasks which take up a lot of time training and commitment need to be addressed because it is the remote fires that are the most difficult and time consuming to control and put out properly. The experience required to competently do these tasks cannot be underestimated and can only truly be learned on the fire ground being mentored by experienced fire fighters. Seasonal fire fighters are an option but will be limited by the ongoing experience required to be truly effective. Social media messaging worked well in my area this year

1.4 Any other matters

My number one issue highlighted again this year is the lack of identifying then actioning hazard reduction by means of mechanical or burning treatments on Crown Lands, Council Lands and private lands in the SFAZ and APZ zones. This has frustrated me as a Rural Fire Service Brigade Captain for years and I think the time of the "volunteer fire fighter" doing all of this work has been shown to be very lacking and especially this fire season. The volunteers are a great resources but not the only answer

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