Your details

Title
Ms

First name
Denise

Last name
Turner

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
On January 4th 2020 we evacuated from Bundanoon. We were unable to return the next day as the town borders were closed. Our house or yard did not burn in the fire but the fire boundary came within less than 200 m from our property. While there was no loss of property in our street, many houses had their gardens immediately around their house burnt.
We believe that our house didn't burn because:
the wind was from Sth East rather than South and the southerly came through strongly but then quickly abated.
We have a Council wetland below our property which burnt but probably slowed the fire.
the wonderful RFS!

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
Climate Change!! We had been through a long period of drought, the extent of which is unusual for our area. Before the fires, vegetation was dying and there was zero soil moisture and low humidity. While we can have dry periods this drought was exceptional and included extremely high air temperatures. This has been happening over a number of years and is in line with climate change modeling. The conditions created by climate change made the fire not only inevitable but also impossible to control. Strong winds were also a factor which made the fires move quickly and uncontrollable. Fires of this nature will become more frequent and even more severe unless we act immediately and decisively to reduce climate change.

1.2 Preparation and planning
Hazard reduction burning is NOT the solution to preventing or lessening these fires.
When you get to the stage of extreme and catastrophic fire conditions hazard reduction burning becomes ineffective. This has been supported by scientific studies. We should not be using Hazzard burning programs for the purpose of PR, to meet unreasonable demands or to give a false sense of security. Frequent burning of natural bushland reduces biodiversity and creates more flammable vegetation communities. This is because fire loving, highly flammable flora quickly fill the spaces after burning. Hazard burning also negatively impacts on flora. Biodiversity is threatened and burning in times when birds are nesting takes a large toll on vulnerable bird populations. Given the increased length of our fire season the opportunity for hazard burning is reduced. There are also serious public health issues with smoke from fires. It is difficult to justify health risks and even fatalities from burning practices.
While there are some situation where hazard reduction burning can be justified we should be very careful that it is appropriate and scientifically controlled. Mosaic burning can be effective but it must not be widespread or too frequent.

Our RFS should be adequately funded and supported. It is essential that firefighters be provided with proper safety gear including appropriate face masks.

1.3 Response to bushfires
There is no simple solution to preventing or fighting fires. It is extremely important not to simplify the issue eg irrationally increasing hazard reduction burning may be called for but should be resisted. Responding to fires and planning for the future should be undertaken by people with expertise and be scientifically based.
And, most importantly, we must plan for the long term future and combat climate change now.

Supporting documents or images