

Your details

Title

Ms

First name

Diane

Last name

Hebb

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

Our property is located in YAOUK NSW, a high altitude valley sandwiched between the Yaouk Bill Nature Reserve and the Scabby Range Wilderness Area. The valley is not heavily populated with at one census counting had a permanent resident number of 13. The open land is mainly used for grazing of cattle with horses and sheep thrown into the mix in smaller numbers. The upland slopes are heavily timbered. Water is sourced mainly from dams, a few creeks and for those on the NW end, the Murrumbidgee River. From Boxing Day 2019 through the 7th of February 2020, our property and lives were affected by the Dunns Road/Adaminaby Complex fires and then the Orroral (ACT)/Scabby Range fire. Up until the 25th of January, either myself (on five occasions) and my husband (on two occasions), would self evacuate as we felt threatened by the Adaminaby fire. There was no local evidence that there were fire crews in our area during those times we evacuated. Local resources were being utilised either closer to Adaminaby or sent to some of the fires to the east of Cooma. It wasn't until the 25th or 26th of January that the local crews started to concentrate their efforts in the Yaouk valley. They did a stellar job preparing a containment line to protect assets along our east to southerly flank of the Yaouk Bill range and started a back burning operation

over three days to stop the Adaminaby/Yaouk Bill fire. Our containment line protected three sheds and two houses along with infrastructure like water tanks. The back burn worked very well and along with protecting our assets (and every asset along the entire line), they stopped the fire from burning into the Namadgi National Park in the ACT. However, as soon as the back burning was completed, it was obvious the Orroral fire from the ACT was coming our way. This fire was out of control with no obvious attempt by the ACT to reciprocate the efforts of the NSW fire crews and help stop the fire before it crossed the border into NSW. There had been in the week since the back burn along the southerly side of the valley, another long containment line put in place along our northerly side or on the Scabby Range side of the valley. The night of the 5th or 6th of February was an extremely anxious time as the wind was roaring and the fire had progressed onto our property both in the bush and on our grazing land. Fire crews were patrolling but were only attending spot fires outside the containment line. Relief came overnight on the 7th of February with light showers to dampen and slow down the progress of the fire. It was probably another three weeks before the fire was totally under control.

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

Obviously the drought was the main cause for the ability of all the fires to run as much as they did. In our area, the fires were started by lightning strikes. These fires taught me to expect the unexpected from fires as we should not have been threatened by a fire front to our east and south. The changing and unpredictable high winds during that period brought the Yaouk Bill fire to our door. I do believe climate change played a role here as the severity of this drought was much worse than the drought before and after the 2003 KNP/Yaouk/Canberra bushfires. Climate change has also changed the pattern of winter/spring rains in our area resulting in much drier winters with little or no snow cover to help recharge the ground water and creeks.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Building practices to accommodate and protect against bushfires have been in place for some time. I think the standards set for compliance in bushfire zones is adequate if appropriately applied during the building phase. What is not useful is the 10/50 rule for clearing a fire break around personal assets. Ten metres is inadequate. Also there are other rules applied by NSW Fire Service with regards to trees around depressions or small gullies in the landscape being treated as "rivers" so trees can not be cleared within five metres of this gully. Their safety net is to consider anything that has a blue line on the map as a river. Local knowledge is not considered or trusted.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Personnel were spread too far and wide. The lightning strikes which could have easily been controlled or extinguished were not attended to sometimes for days, as there was not adequate people or air support to help fight them. The Fires Near Me website and the daily updates became a joke as the information didn't change from one day to the next. The Adaminaby Complex fire covered too big an area and the area is diverse, so what was happening in Adaminaby had nothing to do with us in Yaouk. A dedicated communications person for each fire should be assigned with the express concern with giving all local residence a more specific reading of what is happening. This person should become known to the local residents and contactable. Our information for many days consisted of ..." fire crews are working to contain the fire." Where are they doing this? It was evident for many weeks that there were no fire crews working to contain the Yaouk Bill fire. We became aware that the local crews were using a UHF channel to communicate between themselves. This was of much more use to us as far as gathering knowledge of what was happening in our area. It gave us relief to know exactly what was happening in the area around us. It made us much less anxious and in the end, allowed us to comfortably remain on our property when the fires started to impact on our property.

1.4 Any other matters

Communication is key here. The local volunteer members have to depend on their own UHF radios to communicate with each other and also they use them to communicate with the fire shed control which in our case was in Shannons Flat. Many of these radios had trouble talking between themselves and the fire shed due to two factors. The quality of the radio and also our terrain is mountainous. If the crew couldn't communicate with the fire shed, it

could be a 15 to 25 km drive back to the shed. Precious time lost here. Even crews working the Kennedys Road area had trouble communicating with crews on the Yaouk Road. We need a mobile phone tower as well as a UHF repeater on Yaouk Bill. I know I am dreaming to think this can happen as we are a small community but the valley borders on the Yaouk Nature Reserve, the Scabby Range Nature reserve and the KNP. Many people use these reserves and parks for recreation. Please consider everyones safety.

Supporting documents or images
