



---

**Title**

---

**First name** Adam

---

**Last name** Richards

---

---

**I am making this submission as** Emergency services

---

**Submission type** Personal

---

---

**Organisation making the submission (if applicable)**

---

**Your position in the organisation (if applicable)** Senior Instructor

---

---

**Consent to make submission public** Public

---

---

**Your story**

BACKGROUND: I am a professional firefighter who was on holiday at Manyana Bendalong when the Currowan fire hit Conjola Park on NYE, moved NE to us, and then returned Jan 4. The fire cut-off approx 3000 residents and holiday makers in the villages of Bendalong, Manyana and Cunjurong Point. Local RFS were isolated with only 2 vehicles and all RFS volunteers were exhausted. They were doing an excellent job but did not have the capacity to manage the humanitarian requirements that emerged. Myself and a small number of capable individual established a coordination centre and called community meeting each morning. Without making this a war story, over the following days we were able to feed, water, medicate and finally evacuate all but the residents and no one lost their composure. It was a very positive outcome, particularly considering the emergency warnings being broadcast in the lead up to Jan 4

Situation will be explained in the ToR 1.3

---

## **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

---

## **1.2 Preparation and planning**

---

## **1.3 Response to bushfires**

As the pre-Jan 4 fire activity and warnings were being broadcast, we had 3000 people to keep calm and reassured. They had families (very young and very old) and were frightened. When we held our community meetings, we explained the realistic fire information as it related to our area and situation.

Unfortunately, ABC radio was broadcasting directly from the RFS website and Fires Near Me app and were sharing mis-information (or situational information that didnt relate to us) and creating doubt. This was difficult to overcome and our daily meeting had a significant fire fighting message to explain to the people that they were not going to be wiped off the face of the earth by a wall of flame. This is the message heard by scared people when ABC radio are telling thousands of people to "get off the south coast by Friday" - no context or consideration for circumstances. If we hadnt been able to manage the exodus (evacuation) because people were scared, we could of had a disaster as individuals made a run for it only to end up on a fire effected road or highway.

RECOMMENDATION: That there is a responsibility by fire services to not simply frighten the public with blanket information, but also provide the knowledge on how to interpret that information. Eg: a series of CSA's that show how fires spread into residential areas, how the radiant heat is less of an issue than embers. That being prepared, sheltering, knowing what to look for (and how to easily put it out) is information that empowers people in these situations. Anything less is promoting fear. Additionally, the Fires Near Me app is not an accurate picture for the public to base their decisions. It is delayed, too generalised lacks accuracy and lists fires that exist but are not a threat

---

## **1.4 Any other matters**

---

## **Upload files**

---