

Your details

Title

Mrs

First name

Alison

Last name

Hawkins

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Emergency services personnel

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

The Green valley fire started by a lightning strike in inaccessible country on the 29 of Dec 2019. Lankeys Creek crews could not access the fire from the Northern side because of harvested pine trash that was blocking the pine plantation roads. Pine plantations have signs on the gates saying NO FIRE ROADS so tracks don't have to be kept clear, even for the fire season. Only access was from Talmalmo, the southern side of the fire.

Crews were continually told they would have air support for at least an hour before dark on the 29th and from 1st light on the 30th, but it never arrived. Victorian air support arrived about 11am, but it was too little too late.

Even big fires start as little ones, those on the fire ground know what they need but they have difficulty in organizing heavy plant and air support with little or no telecommunications. Firecoms job is to get the crews what they need and to provide emotional support as well.

Telling those on the ground that you have already lost the fire, when they hadn't is not good for morale!

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

A systemic failure by [REDACTED] to do their job by not getting what crews on the ground needed. Those running the fire were continually lied too, that heavy equipment and air support was coming, but didn't turn up and hadn't been organized in the first place when the heavy plant operator was contacted direct from the fire ground and had to be told to come.

Crews on the fire ground were told by [REDACTED], 100km away, to leave the fire ground because it was too dangerous, without first discussing with those in charge what the actual conditions were like.

This put the crews that stayed to battle the fire in more danger and those that left panicking, traveling on roads covered in smoke.

A decision was made by [REDACTED] to evacuate the village of Jingellic, of not only residents but crews for trucks at night to Albury, those in charge of the fire again weren't told. This then left the residents of Ournie, east of Jingellic with no support to fight the fire on a catastrophic fire day. They also weren't informed that the neighbouring brigade had left. Property, stock and native animal losses at Ournie were massive and it is a miracle that no human lives were lost. The [REDACTED] rang a resident at Ournie 15-20 min before they were hit, they had no other warning.

1.2 Preparation and planning

The only preparation and planning for the fire was done by Group and Deputy Group captains, brigade Captains and crews on the ground. There was little or none from [REDACTED] who chose to continually undermine ground crews, especially in the first week of the fire.

[REDACTED] had little knowledge of where crews, heavy plant were, even the well known pine plantation of "Ardsley", which is on a major road and that was the second week of the fire. Ardsley is on maps, crews were accessing the fire through Ardsley and crew changes were also happening there and [REDACTED] asked where it was!

1.3 Response to bushfires

We have the Woomargama National Park, State and private pine plantations in this area. Why do we not have heavy plant, air support and person power that is specific for this area, to be used in the event of a fire?

Apparently the plantation industry is worth so much to our economy, Why aren't those assets better protected then? By decent width tracks(What RFS volunteers want, not what plantation owners want with the maximum number of trees per Ha) that are regularly maintained. This will also aid in the suppression of fires in plantations and lessen the threat to neighbouring properties.

There is no excuse in the this day and age to have the mega fires we have seen from the 2019-20 season. Lightning strikes show up on mobile phone apps, air support can get to fires before trucks in many cases, equipment is a long way from the wet sack of days past. Most of the fires we have in this area are lightning strikes in the National Park or neighbouring properties, they don't generally start in terrain that can be easily accessed by a truck. Why then, when crews call for heavy plant and air support do they not get it? Cost can't be the reason as mega blazes cost far more, not only in dollar terms but lives, property, stock, native flora and fauna.

Why don't Victoria and NSW Firecom hierarchy talk more, work together and share resources when there is a fire, the fire doesn't stop at the border? We talk to our friends in Victoria at a community level, why can't that translate to help each other during a fire?

1.4 Any other matters

There is an attitude from hierarchy to sit back and see what the fire does, is that to let it get big and then the Federal Gov will pay for it? Instead everything should be thrown at the fire when small to get it out. Those on the ground have to be trusted in their decision making, [REDACTED] can't run a fire from 100km away. Those in firecom have nothing to lose, they still get paid whatever decisions they make. Those that live here have everything to lose.

We weren't burnt out, the fire was stopped on the edge of a pine plantation about 1km from our boundary when the wind changed and it impacted on properties further down the valley in Lankeys Creek.

But this is our community, we have good friends and know people here and in Jingellic, Ournie, Tooma, Mannus and over the border in Victoria, Walwa, where we use the vet, Doctor/hospital and accountant, up the river to Tintalra,

Cudgewa to Corryong. The devastation of our community has been heartbreaking.

My husband is a Group Captain for this area, he feels responsible for what happened with this fire, the tragic loss of Sam McPaul, the destruction of so many properties and stock. They are peoples lives, their life work in many cases. Many people won't just leave that(I wasn't going, my 13yo daughter was with me also) they will stay and defend, whatever the consequences.

Volunteers don't 'love fighting fires' as our silly, out of touch Prime Minister said, they do it to protect what is their life(their house, animals, sheds, the prized tractor, cars, collections, their stuff! whatever that may be)what we have all worked for, as well as to protect their neighbours and to protect our communities in which we live.

The least we can expect is help when we need it from air support and heavy plant, whatever it takes to protect life and property in what could become more common place if global warming is the new norm!

Supporting documents or images
