

Your details

Dr

Title

First name

Stephen

Last name

Ranck

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

We watched our brave fire fighters race past our coastal home on the north side of Batemans Bay to put out a nearby fire on Monday the ninth of December 2020. Helicopters and light aircraft carrying water from the bay flew by in a concentrated effort to put the fire out. Their efforts were successful, saving many homes, we have no doubt and very likely including ours. That was the closest fire got to us, and we understand it was deliberately lit for illegal back burning which got out of hand. We have only praise for the fire fighters who were working in tinder dry conditions which were the immediate effects of severe drought and the long term results of climate change. The smoke haze severely impacted my health and as conditions worsened, we evacuated, ultimately having to go to Queensland for fresh air.

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

Global warming is causing increasing temperatures which in turn are resulting in more severe climate events. In the case of bushfires, our forests are becoming drier and this is magnified by drought which is becoming ever more severe. The tinder dry conditions leave us highly vulnerable to either human or natural causes actually lighting the fire. Around Batemans Bay, there were at least two instances of fires starting because people illegally tried to back burn to protect their properties. Lightning was also directly responsible for igniting some of the fires. In either case, the growing underlying hazard is global warming that is increasingly drying the environment in times of drought. This is the root cause of the problem.

1.4 Any other matters

Public communication was something of a mishmash. A single point of timely official communication would be good. This could reduce rumours spread through social media and sort fact from fiction. It would require more resources. As an example, the RFS app we have is only fair in communication so far in our experience; where livestreaming of RFS briefings on Facebook have been very helpful (but you have to know someone is putting this on Facebook and you have to be willing to use Mark Zuckerberg's service open to rumour in other instances). Similarly using the Live Traffic website one must sort through all sorts of traffic items from heavy shopping and commuter traffic impacts to fire closures and smoke risk. A better system would highlight priority areas and risk to human life. We have found Live Traffic does not always update quickly. At one point it showed all major highways out of Batemans Bay blocked, when in fact to the south, the road had reopened.

We noticed a significant difference in the information provided by councils. Eurobodalla Council gave us very little information whereas we noticed Bega Shire providing much more helpful communication.

Hardening infrastructure: where flooding will not be a problem, consider putting power and the NBN underground rather than rebuilding after every fire. There is clearly a need to harden and protect both power lines and communication transmission facilities, especially communication towers from fire.

Supporting documents or images
