

Your details

Title

Mr

First name

Ed

Last name

Allen

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Emergency services personnel

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Senior Deputy Captain, Beaumont RFB

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

Bush Fire Submission

I have lots of Stories, as a 27 year veteran, but this last fire season changed me. After 5 1/2 weeks battling the same Currowan fire- this time I nearly lost my own house.

This submission will concentrate on the following points;

1. Earlier detection of fires, using Satellites & aircraft
2. Earlier heavy response to remote inaccessible fires with aircraft, instead of waiting for the fire to come out to us.
3. Current aircraft resources were not sufficient

4. Supplement the usual mix of light, medium, & heavy aircraft with Airforce hercules
 5. Supplement the normal rescue helicopters with military helicopters & medical teams
 6. More strategic HR burning around susceptible villages
 7. Better pre- planning, preparation & identification of control lines around susceptible villages
 8. IMT's need to take a 7-14 day approach
 9. Older RFS tankers need to be retrofitted with the cabin sprays & Fire curtains
 10. More fire appliances
 11. Better coordination with electrical authorities such as Endeavour Energy.
 12. Earlier use of Military resources.
- 13.State & Federal & Local Governments need to do everything they can to help stop global warming.

On 4th January, I had evacuated my property in accordance with my own Bushfire Plan. After being advised of a spot fire heading towards my place in Kangaroo Valley, I returned about 7.30pm to refuel & restart my own fire pumps, and roof sprinklers.

I couldn't safely cope with the approaching fire on my own, but I had already been told there were no RFS trucks available to help- even though my property is only 5 1/2 km from town on a bitumen road.

So I was forced to commandeer some NSW Fire & Rescue pumpers from the Kangaroo Valley power station next door.

Whilst I was doing this, RFS trucks on the other side of the mountain, (near Bomaderry/ Nowra) were either sent home early, or sent on a dinner break!

This indicates there are still some local Command & Control issues at major fires, probably because the plans hadn't properly considered a major fire attack from the South.

I am very grateful for the help I received from Fire & Rescue to save my place. I then had to start my own long night shift as Crew Leader of one of the local tankers.

Kind Regards,

Sen Dep Capt Ed Allen



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

3. Current heavy aircraft resources were not sufficient for a bad season - 1 x DC-10, 1 B-737 & a couple of Hercules. They would be more than enough for a wet summer, but not enough for a season following an extensive drought.

1.2 Preparation and planning

6. More Strategic Hazard Reduction burning around susceptible villages, with a Bush/ Urban interface. The HR burns won't stop a fire in Extreme or Catastrophic conditions, but they dramatically reduce the intensity of the impact. This can make it safer for fire brigades to stay & defend a village- instead of being told to leave.

7. Control Lines around susceptible villages. These control lines need to be preplanned, prepared, & identified (marked), so that out of area appliances can quickly see where the best place to light a strategic back burn is located. These control lines need to be a loop road so there are two exit points. Local councils & NPWS, State Forestry, could assist State Mitigation crews with the maintenance of the control lines.

1.3 Response to bushfires

1. Earlier Detection of Fires: All fires start as a small fire. We need to use Satellite technology, or light spotter aircraft, to check remote locations that have just had known thunderstorm/ lightning activity.

2. Earlier Heavy Response from Medium & Heavy aircraft: We need to spend money to save money. Remote fires in inaccessible terrain need to be assessed, then hit hard & hit early. If two days of early (& expensive) heavy airborne attack can save us five weeks of fire fighting and a few hundred homes- then it is money well spent. The traditional method of establishing distant control lines (back burning), or simply waiting for the fire to come out to us, does not have a good success rate in a bad season.

1.4 Any other matters

4. Supplement the Medium & Heavy aircraft fleet with Airforce Hercules aircraft. In a bad season, we need to be able to call on RAAF Hercules aircraft to provide us with a boosted aerial water bombing capability. The relevant squadron would need to gear up & train in advance- but they have provided this capability before. We also need to reconsider the use of Night Vision Goggles & enhanced Digital Terrain displays- to enable night time bombing.

5. Supplement the Rescue Helicopter service. In a bad season, we need to supplement the civil rescue helicopter service with military helicopters & medical teams. It is normal practise to preposition a 4WD ambulance to the staging area of major fires, but the roads are often blocked by falling trees! We also need to preposition some medically capable helicopters close to the staging areas of major campaign fires, to enable the quicker extraction of serious burn victims.

8. IMTs need a 7- 14 day approach. Incident Management Teams need to consider where the fire will be 7- 14 days from now, in case the current control line/ back burn strategy is unsuccessful. If the current strategy doesn't have a high chance of success, or if it's failure will result in major impact on towns and villages- then we need a new strategy as in multiple medium/ heavy aircraft bombing.

9. Older Fire Tankers need Cabin window sprays & Fire curtains, to help protect the crews in a fire over-run situation. We need to retrofit the older tankers so that they meet the same standard as the newer appliances.

10. More Fire Appliances. Eg, my station is the closest RFS support to Kangaroo Valley. We have a two bay station, but there is only one appliance (Cat 2 tanker) in it. It would have been helpful if we also had a Cat 7 or Cat 9 to help us negotiate the mountainous trails in our area.

11. Co-Ordination with Electrical Authorities. We need the electricity authorities to have extra crews rostered on duty for campaign fires when severe, extreme or catastrophic conditions are expected. There are always problems with power poles & power lines with severe fire conditions. We need one of these crews to be on standby at a staging area for each division of a major campaign fire, so they can be quickly deployed, as required, with a fire tanker. On the 4th January, I had to wait two hours for an electrical crew to arrive- and it then took me another four hours, to release a 'trapped' Cat 1 tanker & it's crew.

12. Earlier use of military resources, both airborne & ground resources, in the first week of major campaign fires.

13. Federal, State and Local governments need to get serious with reductions to global warming.

Supporting documents or images
