



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Fiona

Last name

Irvine

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Impacted Property Owner

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

My Husband passed away on the 21/08/2019 and after completing the unending paperwork required for a deceased estate, I received a phone call that my brother who was in the Alfred ICU suffering Congestive Cardiac Failure and that I needed to go to him for support and to support his two sons at Woodend Vic on the 16/12/2019. Two days later I fractured my tibia and experienced the next 6 weeks in a moon boot and reliant upon others to make doctors appointments.

I was in Woodend with very poor phone reception which made communication challenging when a friend () who was checking on (FWF) and who worked for Forest Corporation NSW called to inform me of the proximity of

the Border Fire.

A few days later [REDACTED] called to ask if there was anything I wanted/needed to be collected/saved. I pointed him to a file of paperwork that would prove my identity if needed. He also collected my wedding jewellery. My car, my dog, my bag of clothes was all I had and was my new existence as of the 3rd of January 2020.

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

The day before I left FWF to go to Woodend, I called a friend who worked for Fisheries Vic at Lakes Entrance. [REDACTED] informed me that the Princes Hwy had been closed, however would be opened for my passage through to Woodend. This information was not made available to residents over the border in NSW yet should have been. The fire was left to rage without fire water bombers. This fire could and should have been extinguished before it reached flame heights of 7 kms in height. Fuel loads had not been addressed since the 1956 fire that burned all the way to Eden.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Forest Corp NSW had back burned around my entire property during Autumn. They had cut back over hanging trees along Shelleys Rd which created the illusion of safety. The drought had deeply impacted the bush, to the point of tinder dry. Bees and wildlife were coming to source water from bird baths and water bowls at FWF. It was evident that we were in unprecedented times of extreme fire risk, yet the RFS and National Parks had done nil to prepare nor warn vulnerable residents. The fire to the south and the North could have been extinguished before growing to the size that government agencies enabled. Funding to these agencies resources needed extending not reducing! Fire water bombers needed to be in abundance.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The response to the bush fire was apathetic from government! The communication via mainstream media (MSM) for those like me, caught interstate was poor to say the least. Each state only focuses on their State fires and their victims. I had to rely on my local community to find out what happened. I was almost a week before I had learned the fate of my property. In trying to source support and funding, let alone provide relevant paperwork to prove who I am and that I was a resident was truly embarrassing and dehumanising. I suggested staff from Centrelink and Red Cross look at a map and apparently these supporting systems had incorrect maps. I often hung up the phone in tears due to the distress of having to constantly validate who I am. It is hard enough for people to put up their hands to ask for help. This system makes it even harder when the hand you raise is slapped down!

1.4 Any other matters

The Federal Government only offered 13 weeks for the Fire Disaster Allowance, then I was placed on Centrelink Jobseeker allowance. I have never been on government benefits in my life. I had to also apply for the Job seeker support and I did not have all the required paperwork, so I added random pictures of my property 'raised to the ground'. Yes I was approved, however I have not received any contact with anyone from Centrelink. I have received random text message with orders to go to a service provider. As I stated above, I have never been on

government benefits before and I have no understanding to their jargon.

I have been living with family, friends and complete strangers for the past 4 1/2 months. I decided to house sit as a means to provide a roof over my head without having to purchase furniture. I had 6 months of house sitting lined up. C-Virus brought that to a rapid ending.

I arrived in Tasmania for my house sit at Buckland for 2 1/2 months. I am now in Scamander where I know no one! It is now just my 13 year old dog and I.

I have had no ability to have any counselling because of having to constantly move. My teeth have fallen out because I have been constantly on the move.

I am exhausted!

No support has been provided by any government agency.

The only charity to provide fire disaster funding support is the Red Cross and that was due to public pressure. I applied for funding from other charities and had zero reply.

If I was a Primary producer, given FWF was 129 hectares, I would have had felt more supported, however my property will not be fenced or...

This government is happy to watch victims sink or swim. Watch out you don't fall between the cracks because they are widening at a rapid rate.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

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