



Title	Ms
First name	Frances
Last name	Crane
I am making this submission as	General public
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>My family and I have lived on a bush block, in moist rainforest, north of the town of Dungog, for the past 37 years. Never during that time have we experienced a drought and fire season like that of the Spring/Summer of 2019/20. The creek that runs through our property had been dry for months and the bush, usually moist and leech-ridden, began to wither and die. It was completely outside our previous experience. (Alarming, despite recent rain, the leeches have not returned in significant numbers).</p> <p>Much longer-term residents than us, for instance a local man in his 80's, described the season as unprecedented in his experience, with well-known, reliable underground springs disappearing and mature trees showing signs of extreme stress. With temperatures in the 40's, windy conditions and the air smoke-filled for extended periods, and the surrounding forest a tinder-box, it was a tense waiting game, with local fire crews often unavailable due to their help being more needed elsewhere. We were often "on our own" so to speak.</p>

When the fires were available, their efforts were stirring and their communication systems efficient.

Residents in our area were warned that on days of catastrophic fire danger they had best evacuate to safety as there was no guarantee there would be help in the event of a fire.

We did what we could to be responsible for our own safety and prepare our property, spending in the vicinity of \$10,000 on equipment and materials for a sprinkler system and clearing debris and scrub from around buildings. But there was no certainty at all that we would not be confronted with a firestorm. We devised an evacuation plan and packed valuables and essentials in our vehicles. They remained there for weeks.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

The effects of climate change are undoubtedly the most important factor when considering the impacts of the recent fires on our area. There is already ample scientific evidence to suggest this is the case. Dungog has always experienced hot summers, but our fire season now extends from early spring through to autumn at least. This is new. The window for hazard reduction burning is very narrow indeed. The extremity of the drought in the recent season meant that not only was the bush a tinderbox but grass fires in relatively cleared areas were just as dangerous.

1.2 Preparation and planning

The resources of our local fire crews were under extreme pressure. They were being constantly called away to other areas as well as fighting fires close to home. The length and intensity of the season caused enormous physical and emotional exhaustion. Many complained of lack of government support despite years of requests for more funding and support.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The tension in the Dungog community was palpable at this time. Although we were incredibly fortunate to escape the terrible fate of other communities, there was visible stress, as some local fires burned for protracted periods but were kept under control. It was difficult to remain prepared for the worst because of water shortages. The authorities were slow to declare drought in the area which was an added pressure. The local primary school, on more than one occasion, had to keep students inside due to poor air quality.

1.4 Any other matters

Personally, I feel sharply aware of the need for expert, objective advice when those in power are making decisions on this issue. It must be de-politicised so that as a nation, we can work together to respond effectively, develop resilience and hopefully prevent recurrences of the horrors of 2019/20. It may well require extensive education programs for the general public on causes, ways to prepare and to cope in the event of bushfires.

Upload files
