

## Your details

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**Title**

Mr

**First name**

Fred

**Last name**

Fetherston

## Submission details

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**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

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**Your story**

I have been a member of the RFS and been involved with many fires since moving to work in rural areas of the Hunter/Midcoast region for around 30 years, and my forebears first farmed near Maitland in the 1860s. While fire and bushfires were a part of life, I was brought up to understand they were a natural part of life and landscape and human activity, and this was reinforced when I spent time with indigenous people in Papua New Guinea. Men and women who understood and used fire in the landscape and industry were respected and rewarded by the society that understood their value, skills and knowledge.

The "Hotspots" program helped me share a lot of this with my family and community.

Now I find people mostly don't know how to relate to someone who can use fire to round up pigs in a paddock, regenerate bushland, cook in a camp oven over coals or even operate a forge to make useful tools and beautiful ironwork.

And in the RFS, the paperwork is so complicated that it's become too hard to organise safe burning on our property

and with neighbours like we used to. And everyone just wants to buy more expensive equipment to spray water and chemicals instead of learning how to live with and use fire safely.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

In the last 20 years the wildfires have become more intense and frequent than my oral heritage and reading shows they were, as expected due to more extreme hot, dry weather (human emissions) and reduced small forest mammals (due to cats & foxes).

Also popular culture/media now focusses on fire as a "disaster", and people involved with it are either victims, heroes or criminals - people mostly don't know how to relate to someone who can use fire to round up pigs in a paddock, regenerate bushland, cook in a camp oven over coals or even operate a forge to make useful tools and beautiful ironwork. And I read more and more how litigation is spreading for cases where people burning are being sued for damage from the smoke, which is easier to call attention to and prosecute than cases where more damage is really done from not burning safely and allowing disaster fires to erupt.

### 1.2 Preparation and planning

Without a place for fire and fire experts in society, and a litigious framework for people who light fires, many landholders who want to carry out burning (apart from pile burns) when it's appropriate are unable to do so.

Within the RFS, our local brigade (MidCoast region) worked very hard to get awareness but very few people took it seriously until the fires in the middle of the year.

Unless "leaders" and "celebrities" model behaviours like using fire safely and respecting fire experts, we have trouble being taken seriously and attracting suitable members.

### 1.3 Response to bushfires

Landholders are usually the last to know there is a fire reported on their property.

This means landholders are "set up" for confrontation with RFS crews because of examples like:-

- a. the landholder would have responded and sorted the fire out if the 000 call information had been sent directly to them in the first place
- b. the landholder was managing the fire, and even if they had a permit the central command did not know or did not pass this on to the responding crew

And now there needs to be a HUGE environmental protection response, so that properties (like ours) which escaped burning this year are able to sustain critically endangered plants and animals that can restock the burnt areas as they are helped to recover. Otherwise, what will grow back in many places will be an ecologically poor, haphazard mixture of what happened to survive, along with weeds and feral animals. And that won't sustain our society in future years.

- c. the RFS crew have an agenda totally against the property fire plan and ecological needs. There is no effective way for crews and coordinators (who may be from interstate or overseas) to be aware of government approved property plans

### 1.4 Any other matters

Thank you for carrying out this extremely important task, and especially for extending the submission time with COVID.

I highly recommend the "Hotspots" program.

Also the publications of Stephen Pyne, a researcher based in the USA who has a worldwide understanding of human culture and fire <http://www.stephenpyne.com/>

## Supporting documents or images

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