

Your details

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Other

Submission type

I am submitting on behalf of my organisation

Organisation making the submission (if applicable)

Friends of the Colo Inc.

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

President

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

Friends of the Colo Inc. (FoC) is a volunteer organisation which, for twenty years, has been treating and monitoring landscape transforming weeds in the Colo River catchment, within Wollemi National Park. Following an invitation from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) our organisation also began to survey and treat landscape transforming weeds along the Kowmung River within both the Kanangra Boyd and Blue Mountains National Parks. Our activities are usually two to five days in duration and are conducted in the more remote areas of these three Parks, all within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

Our membership is made up of people with many years' experience walking in the more remote areas of the bush, including in National Parks, and paddling wild rivers within this state as well as other parts of Australia. As well, more than half of our membership lives in areas severely affected by wild fires, both in the recent 2019 – 2020 fires and previous fires. Several were affected by the 2013 Winmalee fires and some have memories of multiple bush fires stretching back as far as 1958.

The unprecedented extent and severity of the 2019 – 2020 bushfires and consequent loss of vegetation, wildlife and diversity has been heartbreaking.

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

As we hold regular activities deep within three National Parks our organisation is well placed to make observations about conditions in these Parks. It has been horribly apparent to us that the bush has become drier and drier over the past few years – frighteningly so. As well as the vegetation being tinder dry, many water courses had dried up. The fuel load seemed to have decreased, due to the ongoing drought. However the fuel was also very dry.

As well, the weather has become noticeably warmer. In the last few years this has led to us abandoning or curtailing some of our activities because it was too hot to operate safely. This has become an issue only in the last few years of our twenty years of operation.

Friends of the Colo Inc. is of the opinion that the root cause of worsening bushfires is the warming and drying of our climate (i.e. climate change) and that, to protect us in the future, Australia as a nation needs to contribute to the global effort to lessen emissions of greenhouse gases. We need to take notice of the best scientific advice. As with the current pandemic this is a global problem and should not be a political issue.

1.2 Preparation and planning

As an organisation FoC is not involved in preparing or planning for bushfires. However, as we work closely with NPWS we are well aware of the considerable efforts made by NPWS staff to conduct hazard reduction activities. Indeed, these sometimes limit our activities. As an example, an extensive hazard reduction burn was carried out in the Kanangra Boyd NP, just off the Oberon Stock Route, in April 2019. Although not in our area of operation, another massive hazard reduction burn was carried out on the flanks of Mount Solitary within the Blue Mountains NP, in May 2018. This reduction in fuel load was instrumental in slowing the Ruined Castle Fire and protecting the homes of several of our members.

As well, it has been apparent to us that the funding of the NPWS has been severely curtailed, leading to the loss of people with years of experience, knowledge and expertise in planning for fire prevention, management and suppression. This has affected the ability of NPWS to carry out the many complex tasks, including fire management, prevention, planning and suppression, involved with managing its extensive estate, with tragic consequences for both the people of NSW and the environment.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The heroic response to the bushfires by members of the Rural Fire Service is well recognised. What is less well recognised is the equally heroic and strenuous efforts of other agencies, including the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. As an understaffed and resourced service their contribution in managing the fires was exemplary and sustained, over many months, and continues well after the fires have been extinguished. NPWS needs to be much better resourced to manage the vast areas of the state included in national Parks, including but not limited to fire prevention, management, planning and suppression

1.4 Any other matters

The State Government is responsible for the greater part of public land in NSW. It is apparent that the resourcing of agencies responsible for managing these lands, in terms of finance as well as the retention of staff with experience and expertise in managing fire and other crucial issues, has been severely reduced. It is ironic and disgraceful then, that the suppression of the recent fires has largely fallen on the shoulders of volunteers.

The effort of NSW NPWS was not finished by the cessation of the fires but is ongoing and arduous. This should be recognised. Problems, such as weed and feral animal control, erosion and damaged infrastructure have been increased and exacerbated by the fires. It is our view that the NSW NPWS needs to be better resourced and that people with years of experience, knowledge and expertise must be retained.

In addition, we are strongly of the view that climate change is the key issue and driver of these recent, catastrophic fires and that similar fires will occur again. We re-iterate - the root cause of worsening bushfires is the warming and drying of our climate (i.e. climate change) and that, to protect us in the future, Australia as a nation needs to contribute to the global effort to lessen emissions of greenhouse gases. We need to take notice of the best scientific advice. As with the current pandemic this is a global problem and should not be a political issue.

Supporting documents or images
