



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Gabriela

Last name

Frizzell

Submission details

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

Your story

The North Black Range Bushfires November 2019.

The summer of 2019/2020 was the second time my husband and I had survived a catastrophic bushfire event.

Our former home in the Canberra suburb of Duffy was one of the few in the street left standing after the 2003 bushfires. Seventeen years later, our new home on 113-acre Braidwood property narrowly escaped disaster, while our outbuildings went up in flames.

We purchased our property at [REDACTED] 30 years ago, and moved permanently to the region in 2013. Our house perches on a hill and from a window on the western side, I remember, we saw smoke coming from the North Black Range on Tuesday, November 26, 2019.

We didn't see the actual strike of lightning, but we saw the plume of smoke after the lightning. We never ever thought it would come as far as our place and impact us.

In line with our fire plan and also after experiencing the 2003 Canberra bushfires, I started to pack our car with photos, valuables, medications and other important documentation, just in case, but we really didn't have any inkling that we would need to evacuate, because at that stage, the fires were so far away.

On Friday, November 29, we rang our neighbour further up the road. His response was, "Don't worry; everything will be fine, I will let you know when the fires are near" he reassured us. Half an hour later, he phoned and said "Time to leave folks, if you're going to leave, you've got spot fires in your backyard."

We immediately locked up our house, hopped in the car and drove to the township of Braidwood – I think we were among the first to register at the Council evacuation centre. Staff there organised accommodation for the night at the Cedar Lodge Motel; the owners, as other locals did, generously donated rooms for evacuees.

Although glad to have a room for the night, it was a restlessly spent night. The township itself was under alert. We didn't really sleep, worrying whether our own place was surviving, let alone if we had to evacuate Braidwood township as well.

At 5am on Saturday morning, our neighbour called. Our house had survived the night. Everything else was gone, our sheds and contents, tractor, generators, and fences. But the house was still there.

We hurried home as soon as we were allowed to return, the next morning. We were just so relieved when we drove up our driveway to see our house had survived, untouched.

The fire had melted our water tank and damaged our solar panels and there were a few spot fires in front of our house – but otherwise, the house was completely unscathed.

We have stayed living in our home since we returned on that Saturday 30th November 2019, after the fires.

Our insurance company was "quick off the mark" to replace our water tank and fix the solar infrastructure so that we had safe living arrangements, as we are totally off grid.

We have also been so amazed at the generosity of people. People that we know but also many that we don't know. Our daughter's neighbours banded together to gather up gardening implements, tools for my husband and vouchers so that we could start to rebuild our lives. Vouchers and financial support also came from other friends as well. The voluntary organisation, BlazeAid replaced all our perimeter fences on our property. Also, Braidwood Life Centre, the Salvation Army and the Red Cross have all assisted. NARG (Native Animal Rescue Group) also supplied food and watering stations for the wildlife on our property, which was very much appreciated.

Now have the hard work of recovery, including removing approximately 50 acres of kunzea by hand. The highly flammable shrub grew thick in the area; that we suspect, is why the fire was so intense. It's not a good bush to have. In one way, the fire has done us a huge favour by getting rid of it all. Although it is now regenerating, but we can make an attempt to keep it under control.

The screening trees along our road boundary were also burnt; while some are coming back, many won't, so a two-kilometre stretch will have to be replanted.

We're surviving. We're navigating the rocky road to recovery like thousands of others. We also consider ourselves luckier than a lot of others who went through this devastating time.

We are including three (3) images, 1. Plume of smoke as seen from our house - North Black Range @ 4.28pm 26.11.19, 2. Fire as seen from same location @ 7.45pm 26.11.19 and 3. 29.11.19 3.27pm
- Photo of the actual moment we walked out of our back door to get in our car and evacuate. This image shows how close the fires were at the time we evacuated.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell our story and experiences in regard to the 2019/2020 NSW North Black Range fires.

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

Of course, drought, hot weather and, in particular, ground level fuel loads would have been just a few of the contributing factors which caused the North Black Range bushfires.

1.2 Preparation and planning

As the fires were in "inaccessible terrain" this would lead us to believe that fire trails were either, non existent or had not been maintained by Agencies and other entities, for clear access to the area concerned. We remember, many years ago, farmers were allowed to graze cattle and sheep in these areas which kept the grasses down, and there was always hazard reduction burning in the winter months to reduce the ground fuel load for the summer season.

1.3 Response to bushfires

As there was no way of accessing this terrain because of either no fire trails or poorly maintained fire trails, immediate management of the North Black Range bushfire, in the way of providing a water bomber early in the piece when the lighting had started the fire, would have been, to our minds, one way of controlling the spread of this fire in "inaccessible terrain".

There was no public warning issued to us or [REDACTED], Braidwood on the day we were evacuated. ABC radio reception is quite poor in this area and sometimes non existent. Braidwood FM Community Radio did an exceptional job in keeping the public aware as to what was happening, but still didn't give the people of [REDACTED] any evacuation warnings. Internet reception is also hit and miss in this area and also in the township of Braidwood, therefore the application Fires Near Me, was also hit and miss. Telephone reception (Telstra) was non existent the week before the fires and very intermittent during the fires.

The Rural Fire Service, not only here in Braidwood and surrounds but all of NSW, really need their trucks and equipment upgraded to deal with catastrophic events such as the North Black Range and the other fires that were happening at that time.

As far as resourcing goes, a celebrity raised \$51 million dollars for the RFS during this devastating time, and to date, we believe,

non of that money has been allocated, as yet, to any of RFS and it (the \$51m) is being fought over in a courtroom. How disappointing is this??

The NSW Govt, Australia Govt including other state and territory Govts and local Councils, should all be on the same page in so far as collaboration and coordination goes regarding management of the bushfires. Again, we believe, the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing during all of the months the bushfires were ravaging NSW. Certainly, people such as the PM and other Ministers should not have been taking holidays in Hawaii and overseas as they did, they should have been here protecting the people of Australia.

1.4 Any other matters

As far as this section is concerned, we think we have covered in our answers above our suggestions regarding the preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks, land use planning and management including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, emergency responses to bushfires including overall human and capital resourcing.

The main thing is stopping the bushfires before they take a hold and get out of control.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- 26.11.19 4.28pm.JPG
 - 26.11.19 @7.45pm.JPG
 - 29.11.19 3.27pm.JPG
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