



Your details

Ms

Title

First name

Jacqueline

Last name

Cantle

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

It's hard to know where to start, our fire , the one that hurt us so much started I think the 26th November 2019. It bore down upon us on the 31st December , 36 days later.

I kept calm mostly until the last few days , when my role working at [REDACTED] had me rostered on duty at the Evacuation Centre in Batemans Bay. It was because of this I was in the hall on the 29th of December at a community meeting. This meeting put a whole new perspective on this fire , the sheer size of it, the worried RFS commander who appeared to me to be wanting to do more than he could, say more than he could, he was clearly worried and it was at this time I became scared.

I tried to communicate this to my family . Since my husband passed away from cancer 4 years ago, I live on my own , with my daughter, her partner and their daughter , my grand daughter living in a seperate home on the same property. I have a son also

however he was safe at the time in Canberra. Our place is 53 acres on the river in Mogo NSW and we had 3 residences on the land , 2 of which were our homes and another was rented out.

However, they did not share my immediate concerns, though I did get my daughter to at least move the horses from the bushy part of the property to the open pasture, we had discussed and made plans on what we would do with the tractor, horse float and boat, move them to the dam in the open paddock , the dam which was practically dry due to the drought. I had packed some things slowly over a couple of weeks , and then intensified over the last few days .

On Monday 30th I convinced my daughter to go out just for the day, there is only one route out of our place through the Bush , and I was uneasy , especially with a 9 month old to worry about. However when evening started to set in , she wanted to go home , this was so much easier with the baby so I begrudgingly did . I was glued to the RFS fires near me app, and saw the advice that asked all residents from Batemans Bay to Bega to move to the larger towns by 8am the next day. After sharing this advice with my daughter she said "we would look at it in the morning"

I set my alarm for 6.am , thinking I wouldn't sleep well if at all, but just in case. I woke at 5.45 am to a room that was glowing orange. My daughter was not answering her phone so I went as fast as I could to her door , she came out half asleep asking me to be quiet or I would wake everybody! I pointed out the sky behind her , which alerted her instantly, we were all out of there by 6.30 am. We had received a text at 6.am to leave , which I missed because I was busy, and head East, we ended up on Malua Bay Beach for 36 hours. There were times through those hours that were extremely scary and I had thoughts we would not make it , sure we were safe from fire on the beach but the smoke. It was so thick and heavy and just got worse and worse it stung your eyes and hurt your throat. We all huddled those first couple of hours , the baby under a woollen blanket with her worried mother. I was just desperate to see some improvement in the blood red sky, some sign that the fire was going away. We couldn't leave until 12 ish the next day. And we were urged to go to Batemans Bay evacuation centre. We had to know , the news from Mogo had not been good , we had to know if we had lost our homes, our horses, our sheep. I took the baby to the evacuation centre while my Daughter Lilly and her partner Harry went to look. Miracle upon miracle we had only lost one home and all the animals were ok. The bush we loved so much that my husband had loved so much was utterly and completely obliterated. We worried for our wildlife , the many orphaned Wallabies that Lilly and her Dad had rehabilitated , the possums living in the possum boxes they had set up the top of the trees. This was a huge blow to our family who valued wildlife so highly. In the following days one wallaby returned , a female red neck that hadn't been seen for a year before the fire brought herself to Lilly's doorstep her feet very very badly burnt. Lilly with the help of local and visiting specialist vets has nursed her back , there were times when her injuries seemed too severe and some who suggested it may be better to let her go. But Lilly persisted and she has made it through.

We lost our little cottage , and lots of fencing and many many trees, the possum boxes are all destroyed and we haven't spotted any possums as yet.

What I would like to know is was there anything that could've been done to stop this fire earlier?

36 days, 36 days of burning and burning through ground and bush that was so so dry due to the drought . I have lived here for 18 years and we have never seen our dams go bone dry. They were bone dry, the grass just crackled under foot it was incredibly dry. I believe Climate change is to blame for this very dry year we

have had. And I can't help but wonder was there anything the government could've done sooner to stop these fires before they became unstoppable monsters that no one had a chance against. They would've known this was a particularly bad year for fire due to the severe dryness of the country. Mogo Forest was also logged all around the immediate outskirts of the town that year. The amount of timber left laying all over the forest floor was huge and it was extremely obvious after the fire had passed through that this is where the fire was at its hottest it was so incinerated. I don't know how these Bushfires are usually controlled, but it just seems to me that they should've known that this fire had the potential to become catastrophic and maybe they could've stopped it earlier.

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

Driest year I have seen in 18 years on this property, I believe it's climate change, and logging on the outskirts of the town. Letting the fire get to a stage where it was so catastrophic.

1.3 Response to bushfires

I cannot fault the teams on the ground, I found the App a comfort. But, was it too little to late?

Supporting documents or images
