

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

1 February 2020

Dear Commissioner

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

In late 2019, when Catastrophic fire conditions were declared for this region, we packed the car with essential and precious items, including water, clothing, medicines, dog food and blankets. Our home adjoins a Bush Reserve and there is forest to the west of us across the valley, where we face the prevailing winds. There is one access road. Until the declaration of a Catastrophic event our bushfire plan had always been to stay and defend our property.

In the lead up to this summer, we had experienced days and months of extremely high, hot temperatures and searing winds, locally. Indeed, the nation has recorded record high temperatures year on year, indicative of climate change (viz Bureau of Meteorology records). We have also witnessed, here, a depletion of rainfall – not only a marker of drought, but a factor of which climate scientists have warned – that as the continent heats up, rain will continue fall in places where it is of no use to our parched landscape, for example, over the ocean to the east of us.

When the fires came, they were described as savage, fast, unprecedented. While the firefront was many kilometres to the west of us, ash and burnt leaves fell in our yard. To date, we have twice packed the car and prepared to evacuate on days declared as Catastrophic. Twice, we have transferred our goods back indoors, breathed a sigh of relief and a prayer for those not as lucky as ourselves – this time....

We think about the stress, uncertainty and fear we thus faced down, momentarily. We feel for those who suffered immeasurable losses. It seems to me that we must also consider how utterly dreadful it would be for the loss of those human and animal lives, habitat and livelihoods lost, if, as a community we were to ignore one of the key causal factors of the bushfires this summer – climate change. For example, if we are to simply believe we can rebuild and continue on as though this is Business as Usual, we risk losing much more than a repeat of these terrible events (as Ross Garnaut so eloquently warned, over ten years ago, and more recently, following the current bushfire crisis).

We must not fail to heed the warnings and pleadings of eminent scientists, former fire chiefs, insurance companies, businesses, the NSW Minister for the Environment, school children (for Heaven's sake) and entire communities, to acknowledge climate change as one of the causes of these terrible bushfires and to do much more to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions (ie more than is being currently claimed by the Commonwealth Government and more than merely relying on carryover credits to present a veneer of climate change action).

To the limited extent that action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions falls within the purview of the NSW Government, I urge it to take that action, as a first step to not only reduce future bushfire risk

but to enable our collective survival. Further, such action needs to be a step up, not merely repeatedly announcing previous commitments. To the extent that the NSW Government can encourage the Commonwealth Government to take serious action to further reduce emissions, for example through a Emissions Reduction Scheme, I would similarly urge that approach.

I also wish to touch on the mounting costs of the recent bushfire crisis - material costs of homes, community infrastructure, etc can be tallied. I wonder how we can or will attempt place a value on human and animal lives lost? How do we assess the cost of entire species lost? How do we comprehend the mental and physical health toll, much of this currently unknown and likely to keep emerging for years? How do we take into account the impact upon food security of lost or spoiled crops and the inability, due to road closures and public safety concerns to deliver food shipments to market? Will we acknowledge the massive amounts of CO2 generated by the bushfires on the negative side of our National Emissions Agenda? I wish to offer a model - some years ago, when a Government appointed Panel was tasked with determining the cost of removing lead from petrol, the Panel members turned the question on its head and asked: What would be the cost (to the economy, community, to the health of children, etc) of *not* removing lead from petrol. As we now know, the lead came out. I believe this bushfire crisis presents Governments with a similar challenge and opportunity.

Yes, we must also learn to adapt, innovate and plan to mitigate the effects of future bushfire crises. However, if we fail to take that most critical of steps of taking significant action to reduce emissions, we will be no better than those mythical citizens described in "The Dangerous Cliff" who 'solve' the problem of people falling over the clifftop by parking an ambulance down in the valley!

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Ohlin

## The Dangerous Cliff

'Twas a dangerous cliff as they freely confessed,  
though to walk near its edge was so pleasant.

But over its edge had slipped a Duke,  
and it had fooled many a peasant.

The people said something would have to be done,  
but their projects did not at all tally.

Some said "put a fence around the edge of the cliff,"  
others "...an ambulance down in the valley."

The lament of the crowd was profound and loud,  
as their hearts overflowed with pity

But the ambulance carried the cry of the day  
as it spread to the neighboring cities

So a collection was made to accumulate aid,  
and dwellers in highway & valley  
gave dollars & cents not to furnish a fence  
but an ambulance down in the valley.

For the cliff is all right if you're careful they said,  
and if ever folks slip and are falling:  
it's not the slipping & falling that hurts them  
so much as the shock down below when they're stopping

And so for years as these mishaps occurred  
quick forth would the rescuers sally  
to pick up the victims who fell from the cliff  
with an ambulance down in the valley

Said one in his plea, it's a marvel to me  
that you'd give so much greater attention  
to repairing results than to curing the cause, why  
you'd much better aim at prevention

For the mischief of course should be stopped at its source;  
come friends & neighbors let us rally

It makes far better sense to rely on a fence  
than an ambulance down in the valley.

He's wrong in his head the majority said,  
he would end all our earnest endeavours.

He's the kind of a man that would shirk his responsible work  
but we will support it forever.

Aren't we picking up all just as fast as they fall, and giving them  
care liberally? Why a superfluous fence is of no consequence,  
if the ambulance works in the valley.

Now this story seems queer as I've given it here  
but things occur which are stranger.

More humane we assert to repair the hurt  
than the plan of removing the danger.

The best possible course would be to safeguard the source  
and to attend to things rationally.

Yes, build up the fence  
and let us dispense with the ambulance down in the valley.