

Your details

Title

Mr

First name

James

Last name

Diamond

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Emergency services personnel

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Senior Firefighter

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

I am a Firefighter working for FRNSW. There were frustrating things about the bush fires of 2019-20; communication between agencies, tasking, leadership, and being there first hand on the fire ground, on multiple occasions this bushfire season, my frustrations were only accentuated. I'm not sure how I am supposed to write this, or in how much depth, so I am going to write about my experience on my shift on the 31st of December 2019.

I'm stationed at [REDACTED] and on the morning of the 21st we were sent to standby at Katoomba fire station. We (my

crew and I) weren't really sure why we were sent there, seeing as all the weather reports that morning were indicating poor conditions for south coast areas. There wasn't really much going on in Katoomba in terms of fires. We were there for a few hours before being responded under lights and siren to the Emergency Services Academy at Orchard Hills, where we sat around for 2 hours before being briefed, along with 3 other stations, about the deteriorating fire situation south of Nowra. This briefing went for another half hour and was using a time stamped weather report from 0700 that morning. It was now 1430, around about the time the weather report was saying that conditions would worsen! This briefing also included tonnage of fuel per hectare of bushland and if fuel loads were to be above a certain tonnage/ha firefighting efforts would have no affect. We weren't told where these unfightable fuel loads were only that they could be there. Useless information for us. I don't know how ANYONE is supposed to identify this on the fireground, just seems like more wasted time when we could be in south Nowra protecting lives and property...

Sutherland was one of the other stations in our strike team. They were made to respond all the way out to Orchard Hills to sit around for 2 hours and do nothing as well and then respond down to south Nowra. It seems silly to send a station that is already halfway to Nowra to begin with, all the way to Orchard Hills for a briefing and safety talk. The Station Officer could have easily done this in the truck, on the way. Seems to me that if they were actually serious about trying to put these fires out, or save lives, or save peoples homes, they would send us down straight away. But now there is a shiny new training academy, "oh it must be used!" Wasting so much time, while people are literally dying.

Our Strike team (4 urban pumpers and 1 Inspector in a 4WD) arrived at the staging area, Rugby Park, in south Nowra, and were then told to go to McDonald's on the Princes Highway in south Nowra to have a meal... right in front of where the road had been closed. There were a lot of residents in the area waiting around because they were unable to get through, all concerned about their loved ones and homes. The time was 1716 and the sky was black with smoke (as shown in attached photo) and there we are, 17 firefighters sitting down eating Macca's... Extremely embarrassing. Civilians were approaching us - some thanking us, others asking why we weren't doing anything (which is what I was thinking) All to avoid paying us a meal allowance I can only assume. It looked absolutely terrible, really shameful.

We went back to the staging area at Rugby Park for a while to then be sent to the Fire Control Centre on Albatross Road, south Nowra for tasking. We were there for a while before being tasked to go and meet 2 RFS tankers to assist with putting out spot fires on Braidwood Road right next to HMAS Albatross Military Base. There was no sign of the RFS tankers and the fire had already been through here and there was nothing left to burn. It was completely decimated bushland. We sat there for at least a half hour, while our strike team leader tried to find us something to do. Eventually we went to the Military Base to see if we could be of any assistance, but to no avail. After being there for a while, we were then told to go back to the Fire Control Centre for further tasking. We arrived at the Fire Control Centre where we were offered refreshments, which none of us needed because we hadn't been doing anything and about another hour went by before we were sent back to Lakemba.

At this stage I was finding out through social media and calling people, that friends of mine who own a Dairy Farm, were facing the fire front without a fire truck in sight. Thankfully they were prepared and had large areas of land cleared around their house and dairy which managed to save them. Unfortunately they lost sheds, a lot of fencing and about 70% of their paddocks. I mean, if I can find out about people who are in desperate need of assistance by looking at Facebook and making a few phone calls, surely the RFS and FRNSW should have more of an idea of what's going on than me and my mobile phone??? The lack of leadership, communication and tasking was absolutely terrible.

We arrived back at [REDACTED] fire station right on midnight. What a way to bring in the new year, by achieving absolutely nothing that day, didn't get the hose off the truck once, while people were losing everything, literally. There were 4 strike teams there that evening (16 trucks total) from FRNSW and I can hands down say that that was the most frustrating and mortifying day I have had in the 11 years I've been a firefighter.

Over the next few days reports of how many homes and lives were lost that day (31st) started to come in. It was disgraceful and made me furious. I thought that being a front line firefighter, I would have been able to do some sort of good, but it turns out, if I had been at home sitting on the lounge doing nothing, I would have had the same affect as I did turning up to work this bushfire season.

James

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

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