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| <b>Title</b>      | Mr    |
| <b>First name</b> | James |
| <b>Last name</b>  | Grady |

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| <b>I am making this submission as</b> | Resident |
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| <b>Submission type</b> | Personal |
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| <b>Organisation making the submission (if applicable)</b> |  |
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| <b>Your position in the organisation (if applicable)</b> |  |
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| <b>Consent to make submission public</b> | Public |
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| <b>Your story</b> | <p>I watched the Dunns Road bushfire build, I fought it alongside my parents, brothers, neighbours, friends, And I continue to help rebuild where I can in the aftermath. My direct involvement in fighting the fire began as I left for my shift on the Lower Bago Bushfire Brigade Cat 7 firetruck, at 2:14pm 30 December 2019. It wouldn't be until late the following night before I next slept.</p> <p>I spent the next few hours observing the smoke, and watching aircraft in the distance. Efforts to advance to the fire front and actually fight the fire were hampered by RFS bureaucracy. Sometime between 6pm and 8pm the truck I was on and the Batlow Cat 1 firetruck advanced to the property owners cattleyards to slow the fire and allow stock to be withdrawn to safety. Both trucks were forced to withdraw as we both ran out of water, no additional trucks were sent to continue attacking the fire as we filled up. Upon our return the fire had escalated and we could not return to our previous position. At this point we were</p> |
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tasked with property protection and had to withdraw to one of the 3 residences on the property. I observed a minimum of 3-4 trucks at each house at this time.

It is worth noting that at this point I had observed no direct assistance from Forestry personnel or tankers in fighting the fire. The only efforts Forestry seemed to be making were to basically hog all air support in the hopes of setting a break between the fire and the Greenhills State Forest pine plantation. Wasted efforts. As darkness fell and we lost the use of aircraft, the fire made it's way into the pine and became uncontrollable.

As the situation worsened, after being relieved by a strike force of additional fire trucks, we left with the other Lower Bago firetruck to prepare our homes as best we could for what was coming. This was approximately 10pm. At 11:19pm I took a rather blurry photo from my neighbours front yard, showing the intense flames on the horizon. The next photo wouldn't be taken until 2:54am New Years Eve.

What took place in those intervening hours is a blur. I remember the hill suddenly covered in pin pricks of light in the dark, then almost instantly rings of fire burst outward as the grass took fire from embers. In an instant it became light enough there was no need for headlights or torches, with visibility only hampered by smoke. I remember the hayshed catch alight. I remember swapping utes when one ran empty of water, as there wasn't time to fill up. I remember hurriedly starting the next pump and scrambling for the hose with one hand while hanging on with the other. I remember forcing myself to not think about what was on it's way to my home, where my mother, brother, and fiance were. Saying "fight the fire in front of you" to myself over and over. I didn't know at this point that my dad and another brother had left our neighbours property and returned home to defend our own.

I believe it was approximately 10am when I finally made it back home, finding my family either safe or with the knowledge the others were okay. Grazed paddocks, firebreaks, and the direction the fire came from spared our main buildings and livestock. But the majority of our place was black. Feed and fencing destroyed. Myself and one of my brothers went to put out flames slowly making their way back from the other direction. The rest of that day was fitfull attempts to rest, and getting what wheels I could off my wagon to swap onto dad's ute as punctured tyres plagued his efforts to defend our other property.

My next involvement in directly fighting the fire was on the afternoon of the 4th of January 2020, as the weather conditions caused smoldering embers to get into grassland and rapidly overcome the several trucks on duty. It was almost instantly into the pine and became once again uncontrollable. The rest of that afternoon is much the same, fight the fire in the grass and protect what livestock and infrastructure we could.

I initially mentioned I watched the fire build. A necessary clarification is that I am referring to the years leading up to this entirely preventable fire. The belligerent negligence of both Private and State Pine Plantations cannot be overlooked and is almost certainly to blame for the severity of the Dunns Road Bushfire.

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**1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

The existence of and the criminally poor management of pine plantations are the primary contributing factor to the Dunns Road Bushfire.

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**1.2 Preparation and planning**

The weed management in the pine plantations was a token gesture at best, when they bothered to do it at all. Rampant

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Blackberries and Bathurst Burr, both contributing to the fuel load while costing neighbours to the pine significant time and money to combat them on their own property.

Management of access tracks is much the same. Attempting to fight a fire once it is in the pine is impossible, and sending a truck in to try is tantamount to murder. There are no firebreaks, there are no clear sections along roads where a stand could be taken to hold the fire. Once the fire is in the pine it can only be fought once it reaches open ground on its neighbours land, and by then the fire is of such a scale it takes a massive amount of resources to contain.

Fire breaks on boundaries are/were non-existent, with trees planted as close to the edge as possible while leaving barely enough room for a ute next to the fence.

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### **1.3 Response to bushfires**

In all the time I spent actively fighting the fire and the time at home watching the road and surrounds, the only assistance I witnessed from forestry was a single ute with a slip on for spraying. Not only was it NOT a optimum firefighting response, it didn't actually contribute anything to the firefighting efforts. Driver got out, turned the pump on, drove around for a bit, got out and turned the pump off then left.

I witnessed absolutely no firefighting efforts or aid from the private pine organisations.

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### **1.4 Any other matters**

In the aftermath of the fires, there has been a significant and widespread increase of flow in waterways leading from or passing through now burnt pine plantations. The most drastic change I've witnessed being a small creek in my parents property. As has become common in recent summers that creek was completely dry New Years Eve (I drove through it that evening while checking on smouldering fires), less than a week later and with no rainfall that creek was flowing and has continued to do so ever since. Pine plantations using such a significant amount of water every day has almost certainly contributed to the areas dry conditions and water issues of recent years, which in turn exacerbated the severity of the fires and limited the water available with which to fight the fires.

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### **Upload files**

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