

NEW YEARS EVE 2019

It is now 5th March 2020 and it is only now that fear and panic seems to have settled due to the recent rainfall throughout the Eurobodalla Shire.

I live with my husband Colin at Moruya Heads and we are one of many that live in this part of the shire that experienced the unknown event of fire. I truly don't think that there are many that live here with 500 homes that are scattered throughout Moruya South Heads that knew what to expect or how to save property and life.

We knew about the fires that had been blazing and engulfing the forest to our north but it was some distance from us and burning from the Eurobodalla Shire at Nelligen to the Shoalhaven Shire to the north. The fire had started on the Nelligan River November 26th 2019 and after the many Facebook post in the Nelligen Notice Board member of the group were saying that it started at this property then someone else would say it was at this creek and so it went till one member said that they came across the fire with the RFS trucks in attendance with fire fighters just standing watching the fire. When asked what they were doing they answered that they had called for a water drop by the helicopter and bucket to extinguish the fire. They said all was good and they left the fire after the water drop and proceed to leave the area with their lights flashing. They no doubt were called to attend another area. Their judgement to leave the fire they had attended was wrong in this instance. With a fire explosive situation which the forest was in due to the extreme lack of rain and fire fuel on the ground any fire in the bush should have been tended till it was deemed completely out. The number of years in server drought that the east coast of Australia has been in was the wrong call from their commander at Batemans Bay.

It is obvious the fire was not out and two other fires started not long after. One at Shallow Crossing and the other further in to Nelligen at the Big 4 Caravan Park on the Clyde River. Both these fires started on the same day as the first call out November Tuesday 26th 2019.

The Shallow Crossing fire was not contained and continued north in drought dry tinder forest spread along to Brooman taking everything in it's path. Brooman an old settlement of wooden cottages from bygone days when the area was rich in timber cutting and saw milling which was shipped along the Clyde River. By the grace of God the old timber houses that are clustered together missed the fury of the fire the locals tell me. But any smaller settlements in the path of this raging fire was gone along with any historic artefacts. Much of the old growth forest was lost along with some huge trees that the early pioneers left when logging was their profession. The old timers of today have said that Nelligen and north into the Shoalhaven Shire have had fires before but nothing like these fires.

The fire spread to Benandrah, north to Termeil then to the coast of Bawley Point, Kioloa, Pretty Beach, Pebbly Beach, Depot Beach, North Durras in the Murramarang National Forest. Fire then moved at a fast pace with the constant wind change and Long Beach, Maloney's Beach and to Surfside on the north side of Batemans Bay.

Many of these little beach side holiday villages lost home and put many lives in danger, these fires struck at such a force that people had no warning to leave early and the RFS "Fire Near Me" apps that everyone was checking constantly could not keep up as the fire spread. Roads were closed, and the fire created it's own fire storm sending clouds of red hot embers in black clouds ahead of the fire front towards people and homes. Some people have reported that balls of eucalyptus oil which was burning was thrown ahead of

the fire front which started spot fires that spread the flame long before the main fire caught up. Animals from the bush had no where to go and if the drought had not already taken its toll on the wildlife this fire finished them off. Many volunteer firefighters were so traumatised by what they were seeing in the bush what had happened to the animals were not able to talk about it. These are images that will live with people for ever and some that had not burnt lay in pain from burns for hours or days. I think that only the lucky ones were found and taken to WIRES for care but I am sure that many suffered.

WIRES carers that had been caring for animals before the fire took unexpected losses of animals that were in outside compounds the next stage for release back to the wild. So many heart breaking stories of them perishing and not able to be freed from sheds or fenced areas. I know my husband and I took to WIRES carers in our area what we could to help out, bird boxes, possum boxes, cages, carry boxes, towels, blankets, sheets, soft igloo beds for the baby wombats and what we didn't have we purchased on line and delivered when they arrived. Donations of money for medical treatments and food we tried to do our part. We brought a large wooden bird cage that could be converted to a baby bat habitat that gave the carer a chance to hold and attend the bats in a confined area and not scattered throughout their homes.

Wildlife was only a small part of the loss of animal life. When people fled the fires many horses were not able to be transported to safety, I was told that some had to wait too long for horse floats from friends and by the time they arrive when the horse was moved to safety it had already been too long in the approaching fire heat and had cooked inside the carcass. On the advice of the vet many pet horses we put down even though the horse looked fine and well which added more stress and heartache to the owners.

There was not only horses effected by the approaching fire but when people fled their homes they left aviary birds, house caged birds, their fish in tanks, cats and dogs, hens and ducks. When we drove around our area at South Heads we noticed dogs left on verandahs and yards, dogs barking at the smell of smoke and the owners had left sprinklers going in their yards or their roof sprinklers that were connected to town water maybe thinking that their animals would be safe. Birds and hens still in their cages and one of my immediate neighbours when asked if he was taking his caged canary he said he had put it in the bathtub in the bathroom. As seen by photos of burnt houses the bathtub does not survive so that bird was dead once it was left behind. This neighbour's hens were not a priority to him at all so their life was lost. In my case I had caught my two aviary lot of birds. They were confined in large carry canvas boxes with seed and dishes packed to evacuate if needed. The one heartache I had was that I was not able to catch my two Muscovy Ducks and cried tears when I said good bye to them as they would be lost if fire had come. Another very sad thing we had to do was to leave a number of possums that have made our home their home in the possum boxes that we have supplied for them. This was something we had to do after relocating them in the beginning had not worked and they found a way into our floor lining as we have a split level home. Now we have peace and quiet from possum fights at night but if the fire had taken our house the possums would have perished.

December arrives and people are making their way to their holiday homes and to the parks to enjoy their Christmas Break. People are talking about the fires north of Batemans Bay but were not overly concerned that they would come south. Then in the first few days of December a woman in a crazed panic broke into a conversation on the Batemans Bay Notice Board asking if anyone at Currowan could smell smoke. She said that she couldn't see any but the smell was there and if there was a fire she needed to get her horses out of

danger. The post back to her was “no fire we can't see or smell any smoke”. I didn't hear from her again and by the end of the day the Fires Near Me app had warned a fire at Currowan had started. We know now that the Currowan fire was to be the greatest destroyer of all and anything in it's path was going to burn. The fire with wind behind it took to the Clyde Mountain and devastation was caused. The town of Braidwood was to experience fire and along the mountain range it continued to burn in areas that no firetruck or man could make their way into the dense bush. There had been smaller fires start on the Clyde Mountain members of the Nelligen Notice Board had said and a grass fire in a paddock where a resident of Nelligen jumped the fence and wet bagged it out. There seemed to be little fires starting everywhere whether the RFS knew that they had been purpose lit I don't know but if they were they were not going to stop till all the bush was on fire. The Currowan fire was reported that a lightning strike had started it but residents had said that there was no lightning. When I told this to a resident of Nelligen she said that a lightning strike was not something that you see being different to the normal storms. They were short bright flashes and if you were lucky you would see them out of the corner of your eye. They appear only to be in the clouds but they will travel to the ground and bury into the leaf matter/humorous or into a tree and just stay there till the conditions were right and then explode into fire. She said that is how the locals thought that the Currowan fire started. I am no fire expert and now nothing of the bush or how to fight a bushfire but I do know that if what I have read that the scientist had warned the Government and all the authorities including the RFS in 2016 that a major bushfire will happen in 2020 if the conditions of the rainfall and temperature did not improve. So it seems that many many people knew and nothing was told to the general public and an advise that all residence should clean up their property just in case the warnings were correct.

I remember the panic on social media Facebook from people looking for answers such as, > where are the fires, what roads are open/closed, is there need to evacuate. Because there was very little on the radio or tv and the “Fires Near Me” app was so far behind most of the time(unreliable), people from everywhere joined the Batemans Bay, Moruya, Malua Bay, Mogo, Narooma Notice Boards to find out what was happening,a lot where interested in their families welfare.

We the groups, grew by 15k new members extra in two weeks,the admins of these groups, my husband is one along with two others one being from Canberra were updating information day and night. 18hr shifts over lapping, also there were two moderators in the back groups cleaning up old news, and searching the net/radio/tv/scanners/phones for anything that was relevant to fires in our area. When one had a break from the computer the other would take over and so this went on for weeks. My husband was tuned into the RFS- Aircraft movements– numerous informative(windy.com) fire related websites to gather as much as they could provide for the public. Links below.

<https://www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/5578/web?fbclid=IwAR0-6XTSwqmTKLCeqJgWKC3whtYAOXEb7iFA7kPoH1M6uiEUxy2nCm1j2JA>

<https://www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/24950/web>

<https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html>

<https://www.windy.com/-Rain-thunder-rain?rain,-33.859,151.200,5>

<https://myfirewatch.landgate.wa.gov.au/map.html>

https://hotspots.dea.ga.gov.au/?fbclid=IwAR3rVyjb68zO4fpcL_ISvFWIF6hHnpOZ8gwSQTfLGbU

lizuua-OTi1DMh2c

<https://bushfire.io/?location=10/-35.789411871184576/149.50469970703128/Satellite>

<https://www.flightradar24.com/-35.64,148.95/8>

<https://www.livetraffic.com/desktop.html>

When the power went out in many areas for days on end, this is when panic struck the community, my husband drove to where ever he could find internet so he could update the notice boards to keep the now over stressed public informed. The admin that was operating from Canberra just in case all our local Internets went down, which they did often. Warren then went days without sleep because he could update from his end and that kept the ones on the coast informed. Because the internet was so scattered from times people asked each other to check the notice boards if they had the net on and send someone to tell them what was happening.

Now to what happened at our place at Moruya Heads on NYE, that is when the gates of hell opened and I don't think anyone on the south coast felt they were going to survive. The Eurobodalla Shire was under attack so it seemed and it certainly sounded like it. The sky at 6.30am was orange and the sun that was coming up looked like it was on fire so red. The morning was hot and not a sound coming from any bird life, they had all gone. I was with my husband in the back yard going to feed my aviary birds and I remember standing at the end of the concrete path looking to the north at the sky. To the left of us in the sky over the top of the tree line we could see white smoke just bellowing into the sky, we thought that a house was on fire. Then to our right in the sky moving towards us was the reddest yet black boiling cloud coming towards my husband and I. As we looked at it my husband said "my God that is a fire cloud and the black embers of fire are swirling around in the cloud if it stops above us we will be dead, burnt to death." At that moment we both felt a calm come over us like we were being covered by a huge cape and the panic left us. Just then as the cloud stopped it was like a finger flicked the cloud to the right over the ocean. It was gone and we then realised that we had better catch the birds and pack what we needed to be ready for the call to evacuate.

The morning progressed with an air of emergency with neighbours coming out into the street and looking to the sky. We could hear the water bombers racing and we had no way to know where they were heading. Helicopters with water buckets trailing behind and flying in all directions.

We had been told to if we were going to evacuate we had to do this by 8am and go to the centre at the Moruya Show Ground. Seemed everyone took notice of the warning on the emergency alert on their mobile phones. Everyone asking questions on social media and listening to the RFS online updates.

The man at the end of our street was going to the Moruya Airport for the daily briefing on wind, temperature, fire positions. When he came back home he went to his shed and pulled the fire hydrant hose out and connected it to the fire main in our street and said to the men of the street to hose all the houses, front and back as the fire is coming. It is to late to leave now and we will have a chance if everything is wet. My husband and the other men of the street very quickly handled the hose finding it very hard to get into peoples yards as they had left and locked gates. If there had of been a fire their houses would have

been burnt because fire fighters would not have been able to gain access to their yards.

The order was to hose the houses three times but once was done and the water level from the water tower at Moruya Heads had dropped low as there was very little pressure in Moruya itself. The fires drove around and found that when people evacuated at Moruya Heads they left sprinklers on the roof and yard going and drove away. They all had to be turned off and to make it so much worse we were on water restrictions and could not use the hose out of the allotted time. When the RFS man at the end of our street came back from the meeting he was attending he said to not do any more watering as the wind had changed and the fire was in Batemans Bay and taking Malua Bay out. The small villages like Rosedale, and Lilly Pilly had lost so many houses they were hit hard. We had dogged the bullet but these poor people without warning lost everything they owned and even today the 20th March they are still waiting for their land to be cleared and somewhere to live.

The next area to go shortly after that once again put us in the path of the fire was at Waldron's Swamp north of Moruya. A large area for bats and wallaby's so much of our wildlife had lost their life that day. The fire spread to parts of Broulee and again fear was that the fire was going to cross the Moruya River and the Heads would catch a light.

For weeks the fires burnt to our south, north, west and everyday the sounds of helicopters water bombers, were none stop and it truly sounded as if we were in a war zone with enemy fire around us. It was so frightening and the bird life here was on my verandah and hiding in areas in my yard. They as well had no idea what was happening with the fires, smoke, red or grey orange skies and the night was no better. Constantly out side watching the windsock and RFS updates. Life was sheer misery and I am sure at one time if I had the chance I would have left and never come back.

The two cars we own were packed for three months and only now we are starting to take things out that we need to use. The bird carry boxes are still ready to go if need be with bird nets in place.

Fire never came to Moruya Heads but the area is rich in fire fuel and one spark will set it off and there seems to be no one interested in coming to clean up anywhere around the Heads. The National Parks are the worst as they have not touched a thing in their parks and should open the parks back up to those who want to clean them up. People with fireplaces would willingly collect the dead wood for their winter fuel but no one dares touch a blade of grass for fear of prosecution from them. If you read this story and you have any compassion for animals and human life take the care of our nature reserves and forest away from National Parks as they have no idea what they are doing.

We were ready to evacuate 6 times when the fires were on and each time fear and uncertainty ran our life. To the normal person who was not in Government-Council-RFS-SES had no idea what was happening every time the scream of the water bombers took to the sky. All we could do was stand outside in the heat and wind and watch and time where they were dropping water. Sometimes it was a very short drop and they went all day. This told us that the fire was close and further south of us. Just where was a guess so the constant checks of Facebook Community Groups with people asking each other what was happening, how far is the fire and should they leave. The shire council infrastructure director was co-coordinating from the councils end but on the last day of fires that the South Heads community was concerned about the silence from council on updates in their media where everyone was looking. It felt like that we were on our own and with no

guidance we all just looked to the sky and hoped that we were safe.

We managed to live through this round again and when the smell of rain filled the air you could feel the relief of pressure that was all around our community that the hope of fire might eventually be out and life would progress without the constant fear. Still every night I found myself on the back verandah watching for fire, the smell of smoke and the sounds of air fighting equipment.

The days passed and more rain fell and didn't seem to know how to stop. We were all grateful on social media that at last the rain had fallen and it looked like the drought might at last be broken. This caused another problem with the helpers of WRIES who were doing food drops for the animals that escaped the fires but had no food. WIRES helpers said that the rain was soaking the Kangaroo pellets and they were less inclined to eat them as they were mash. So helpers left chaff instead and fruit/vegetables. The vegetables mainly consisted of carrots which they were getting large bags donated to them by the supermarkets. This was great but we were all told that the Parks and Wildlife rangers were still going ahead with the drop of 1080, (A minimum of three 'free' feeds (without toxin) are required prior to laying 1080 poison bait except where an Authorised Control Officer recommends otherwise. Using carrots, 3 free feeds at 2 to 3 day intervals are best.) A copy from the printed material from the Department of Primary and Industries page.

This sent horror through WIRES helpers as the carrots that the wildlife had been given and everyday seemed that the Kangaroos and other animals had cleared the drop site would indeed eat the 1080 poison carrots not knowing what would happen to them. So a message went out through social media DO NOT FEED ANIMALS CARROTS and then the reasons why were written under the warning. This then set off an out rage that the department were still going ahead with the poisoning of rabbits where most would have been killed by the fires. Killing these took food from other meat eaters that were still alive that obviously no one in the department thought about or might I say cared about.

Because Moruya South Heads had escaped the fires it was a chosen area for release of animals that had been treated by WIRES helpers. This would have happened going south as well, the fires had left these small settlements intact. We saw more bush Wallabies, Wombats, small Kangaroo families grazing on the grass over our fence boundary since the rain. It gave us comfort that the small amount of pellets that we left at dusk was only half eaten but the water buckets were still needing to be filled on a regular basis. I did notice that our family of possums that live in our yard and have always done from generation after generation since our arrival in 2001 were leaving what food we would leave them of a night to eat the pellets that the wild animals left. On writing this article today Sunday 19th April 2020 we have no need to feed the wild animals or leave them water as they are no longer come to us for help. Yes, we still have the possums with the possum boxes still full and they are left by us fruit and a few vegetables at night, there is enough growth in the garden for them to pick.

We still have a number of bird species that visit the yard everyday and this is a good sign that even with the horrors of drought, fire, flood they have managed to breed again as many young are flying with them asking the parents for food.

I want to write about the Magpies in a small segment of this document of the fires that the NSW Government have asked people living in the fire zones to write.

Since we moved to Moruya Heads in 2001 from Canberra where we had Magpies there but never took much notice of them the house here came with two Magpies, These two were a breeding pair and over the many years of living here we have had the pleasure to meet every chick that they had reared. Seem this was the practise to bring their young to this yard to introduce them to the people and let the young know that they were safe here. Magpies do this I have learnt over the years. During the drought the Magpies from all over South Heads were gathering at our place and it ended up a total of 30 Magpies lived here and would not leave. This included the parent birds and it was a great induction of just how dry the bush was to have parent and adult young with them. If you know anything about Magpies the father bird once his chicks have reached a certain age will hunt them away from his territory. So this is why we knew that there was something seriously wrong with the environment and these birds needed our help.

Magpies eat red meat, worms, grubs, moths, ants, etc. So as we could afford we brought meal worms for them but this became so expensive that on a old aged pension we had to turn to mince meat. At the height of the fires and trying to feed these birds the power to all our homes went off and was off for days in our area. Our freezers all defrosted and everything was spoiled. My husband and I were ok as we are Vegans but the mince for the Magpies went off and no matter how we searched the supermarkets were not able to stock it. Over a period of weeks we tried to feed them chicken or turkey which we were still able to buy. The birds would not eat small pieces raw so we slightly cook it. Some were so hungry they ate small bits but others turned away and still cried for me to give the mince. We tried dog food and still some went hungry wanting only mince. Then when we thought that we were going to see these birds stop coming in to me we were able to again buy mince but it was in ration a packet at a time. This would not feed 30 Magpies so we mixed it with boiled rice and rolled 80 gms for three feeds a day from the 500 gms I put aside for each day. We could get two day and then would have to search for more mince. The 30 Magpies would all line up on the rail of my ramp on the verandah and each one knew that they would get a small piece and then after the last one I would start at the front again and go down the line. I must say I felt like Jesus in the biblical story of feeding the multitude bread and fishes.

I could see the improvement of the health of the Magpies as the weeks went on. When they first came for help they had fire ash in their feathers and they were not able to clean it out. Their beaks were cracked and the holes for their nose were blocked with compacted clay like ash and they were all breathing through their mouth. Inside a Magpies mouth is normally lovely pink and a moist tongue but every time they opened their mouth it was dark dusty grey to look at and very little moisture on their tongue. They were all seriously dehydrated, some were not able to

fly any distance or gain any height so they sat very miserable looking in amongst the leaves of the lower branches of the trees. Their tail feathers were falling out and their eyes were dull and very smoky to look at. Many of them when they tried to walk on the path had the appearance of being intoxicated and this improved weeks after they could get a regular diet which I was supplying.

My Magpie's all started to improve in health and had the strength to wash in the dishes of water I left out for them and the fire ash started to leave the feathers and fill the bottom of the water dishes which look like mud. Their eyes started to look clear and the beaks had the colour of light grey coming back into them. I was convinced that what I was doing was bring the Magpies back to health and to a stage where soon they would be able to feed themselves.

Well this independence took a good month to six weeks but I was able to see a decline in number of birds coming in each day. They came in small groups of 10-15 at a time, then down to 5-6, then a pair would come and sit at the back door looking for food. The interesting thing was I could see them walking in the garden in my front yard looking for food themselves and each time they come for a piece of mince (which was a small pinch by this time) their beaks were very dirty and stained by the dirt of the garden. I could see their crops quiet full when they sat at the back door so what they got off me was a treat for them.

Today as I write I can safely say that I have a small number of these Magpies calling me for food as many have flown and are in trees all around the heads. I can hear them calling each other but no where near my place. There has been enough and continues to be enough rain to bring the food they like to eat out of the ground and they are healthy now so to be able to fend for themselves.

Drought, fire, flood, it has decimated our insect world including the microbe world that as humans we think nothing about. I study these things as part of my daily routine always checking to see if I see spiders, ants, bees, and I know by them what the weather is going to do for that day and after these horrid events since NYE these things have been so mixed up. Days are cold, wet, hot, the insect have no idea what is happening. I find that bees are following me around the garden hoping that I don't pull the flowering weed out as it is their source of food. So yes I have a lot of ground flowering weeds but it is better to feed bees and ants than pull them for the green bin to enjoy. My husband got scolded by me the other day for cutting a dead bloom from the ginger plant once it had finished blooming it had so many ants feeding from it. As I pointed out to him to just look at nature before you make the next step something will go hungry because of that.

From the drought, fires, floods, we now have a number of bush rats and their partly grown young coming in looking for food. We have live catchers where once caught we take them back to the bush where they belong. The worst though is the paralysing ticks that are hanging on every leaf in the garden with their extended claw arm

waiting for us to walk past. They claw onto our clothes and make their way into some soft skin and we are being driven crazy by them. They look like a tiny brown splinter but to look at them under the microscope you can clearly see they are a tick. The clawing at the skin to bury itself in is leaving a red welt on the skin and so itchy you want to take to your skin and cut it out with a knife. We manage between the two of us to see them and with the tweezers pull them out or a spray of methylated spirits they let go and you can pick them off. If you lived on your own you would be driven mad with the red lumps and itch.

When the fires reached Batemans Bay the visitors from Canberra and Sydney were asked to make their way home early as the roads out of Batemans Bay to the north, south and west were going to be closed and anyone still at the Bay would be stuck there. As the fires spread from Long Beach south towards Batemans Bay panic broke out with the holiday makers. They panicked and cleaned the supermarkets out of all the staple foods including packs of bottled water. The petrol stations felt they needed to fill emergency worker's vehicles first before locals or visitors. When you are a visitor and you are in a town which is full of fire all your instinct tell you is to get the hell out of there. Because there were queues of cars wanting petrol fights broke out between the motorists and petrol stations attendants to the point where the police were called because of pushing and shoving, and we were told that there were 10 drive offs with no payment in one day at the petrol station across the bridge north side of Batemans Bay, etc. Fear makes very nice ordinary people do horrible things and when a shire has to call the riot squad in to manage shoppers cleaning out supermarkets is something that locals had never seen before.

“Elsewhere, long queues formed outside supermarkets and petrol stations as residents and tourists sought supplies to either bunker down or escape the fires, emptying shelves of staples like bread and milk.

More than 50,000 people were without power and some towns had no access to drinking water. “Everyone’s just on edge,” said Shane Flanagan, a resident of Batemans Bay on the NSW coast.” extract from Reuters 2 January 2020

Fires were jumping from one side of the highways to the other and making its way to the ocean with no hope of stopping it. Visitors were in their cars for hours while the fires crossed the highways. Power lines fell to the roads and police patrols had to be stationed on the roads to stop people from trying to break the road blocks and some headed out into the bush on tracks that they knew only to find themselves in trouble because fire was still active, bridges over streams or creeks were burnt, road direction signs burnt and some people found themselves lost. I can only imagine how upsetting it would have been for the RFS fire fighters to have to go and look for idiots who thought that they knew better.

A man on Boxing Day 28th December 2019 who has a property in the Deua River Valley set his property around his house on fire to clear out any snakes so he could mow his grass to help save his house if fire was to come. He then went inside to watch the start of the Sydney to Hobart Boat Race and realised that the fire he thought was out had flared up and the bush around his property was on fire. I don't know how long before he called for assistance but this fire burnt such a lot of property and up into the mountain ranges where only the water bombers could get access. Because of this careless person and his good intention of clearing his grounds, people lost their homes, wildlife died as well as stock. I was told by a council workman who is a RFS fireman that this man came into town to the pub and locals at the pub told him to get out that he was never welcome back to the town or pub. So I would think that this person would have no future in this shire and will no doubt in time have to leave.

The fire took Mogo and claimed many shops. It took our friends home and honey business. It as well took the Old Mogo Gold Town Tourist Attraction which was saved from the 1997 bushfire that locals fought to save their town. The Mogo Zoo in 1997 was high on the fight and protect agenda for the fire fighters but this fire was taking everything in it's path and Mogo Zoo had no help to save their zoo. I am told the manager and his staff that totalled 15 people fought the fires in red smoke filled air on their own to save the zoo animals. Most of the zoo are exotic animals and would have been at an escape alert ready to run. The zoo was save but had infrastructure damage and the zoo had only just opened again recently only to close now because of the Coronavirus.

A close friend that lives at Mogo said that they had very little warning and that the fire was out of control and heading to the town. People living out west of Mogo had already lost their homes as the fire spread across their properties heading to the township. Our friend said that he had the warning to leave and had sent his wife to Tomakin to safety and he stayed to fight the fire, he was a RFS fireman but retired due to ill health. He said that the fire at his property was so intense that the heat burnt through his fire coat and he never had time to get his goggles, gloves or helmet. He could not have got to them because the fire had already taken his shed where they were stored. The heat he said started to cook him inside the coat and he was peppered by flying objects from the house next to him that was on fire. He managed to save his home but suffered eye flash, burnt tops of his ears and hands. He said to stay was not the best decision he had ever made. On further talks with my friend his burns have healed and his eyes are improving but his experiences will live on in his memory for ever. This fire has changed him and his family and like many others realise that your life is far more important than your property.

With the help of the Eurobodalla Shire Council RFS commanders and various NSW government officials asked the NSW Government to call the services of the Australian Army as it was too much to stop this way out of control bushfire to bring service people,

medical and experience to help local people survive the fires. They were not here in the capacity to fight the fires but to lend assistance when needed as back up. The trucks rolled into Batemans Bay and photos were on all the social media group pages. They set tents and parked trucks around them on MacKay Park across from the shopping centre. They stayed at Batemans Bay for many weeks until the fires were under control. They moved personal further south to the Bega Shire which had been severely hit by fire and over the boarder into Victoria where they could assist the Navy.

The Australian Navy also sent a ship south to Batemans Bay. Extract-
Reuters 2 January 2020

“The HMAS Choules is expected to make two or three voyages over the coming days, state authorities said. “

Notices on the Moruya Noticeboard said that there was a navy ship off Moruya Heads and everyone was asking was that ship here to take people on board because Moruya Heads was going to be impacted by fire and the ship was the only way out. No one knew and all the guessing in the world never gave us any comfort to what was to lay ahead for us. My thoughts on the reason the ship was so close to the Moruya Airport was to take supplies ashore for the water bombers and the large fire fighting planes that came to the airport. Nothing was ever reported to the public and again many of us were in the dark to what was happening.

In the midst of the fires when the power went off because we still have gas for cooking our neighbour across from us were here everyday. They have young children and they were in a state of panic most days. They had no way to cook and no emergency lighting. So we gave them battery lights, and cooked food for them here only trouble is we are both Vegans so they had to eat Vegan, didn't hurt them and they got through it without going hungry. Another neighbour from the next street came early every morning to have a cuppa and fill his thermos for the day.

Emergency like we had all experienced at the beginning of 2020 brought out good but evil in people. Neighbours drove around checking on peoples homes that had left to go to the shelters as there were thieves taking what they wanted from peoples homes with no one to stop them. The neighbours at the end of our street walked on dark in pairs checking that no one in the 4 streets that make up our area was being broken into. This was the evil that this fire brought out of people and the good was that people in our street talked and I am sure that it was comfort for some.

The fires also brought out people from Government that stood shoulder to shoulder with our fire fighters and one in particular was Member for Bega Andrew Constance. He is a member of the NSW Government and he stood and fought for his property where he could have turned and run. Because of this he has now the respect of the Far South Coast as a person that will fight for the people that he represents in his electorate.

When we thought that we had seen the worst of the fires fire started in Mourya and was very active behind the North Industrial Centre Moruya and the water bombers

worked none stop trying to get some sort of fire break in place as in the right wind the fire would have come into the Moruya town centre. As it was it travelled behind the town in the hills to the west of the town and into Yarragee. Homes were lost and like many roads in the shire there was only one way out for the residents. I can imagine what it was like with fire taking home intermittent some on the left then the right of the road. The fire came right to the council waste station and the fire was so fierce there because of the rubbish for recycling that was there. Then it came into the homes and streets closest to the tip and the fire trucks raced to the Moruya Hospital as it was in the line the fire was taking. The evacuation centre full of people at the Moruya Show Ground would have been in serious trouble if the fire had got to the hospital, fire could have damaged Mourya town centre itself . The wind at this stage of the afternoon was a strong north/west and all we could see was black/grey smoke coming from town. There was no communication at all from anyone and my neighbours across the road had said that when we thought that things were going to get to bad that we would all leave and go to the beach. Really no where was safe there is as much bush to our east as there is to our west so either way we were at the mercy of the wind.

The one thing that is needed desperately is a fire truck stationed at the Heads for any small out breaks and those first fires could be put out long before a major full force bushfire started. We had been told from the very first day of the fires that there would be no fire trucks with men available to come to the Heads to help, anyone that had stayed would have to defend themselves and the best advice was to leave your home and go into town.

We lived through it and then only had a week or two to feel relaxed then the Covid 19 virus struck. First when it hit the world and people were dying it didn't register that it would come to Australia but here we are today in a country so far away from the rest of the world and we have people dying from it. Again fear is with us, then we all know that the summer is only a few months away and because the Eurobodalla Shire burnt 80% there is still 20% that could possibly go this summer and I live in that 20%. So life is a nightmare, we are living day by day. Staying home and using Woolworths Home Delivery for our food. What we do for our Chemist prescription needs in a weeks time I don't know. I guess we run the gauntlet again.

This is my story of the 2019-2020 Bushfires
I am Jennifer Butt OAM