



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Julia

Last name

Braithwaite

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

Members of my family have lived at Kurrajong Heights since the 1860s, so I have a deep connection and love of the bush and the environment in which we have chosen to live. As a child during the 1950s and early 60s I was never frightened of fire as it was just never discussed - until 1968 when fire swept in from the Blue Mountains National Park and State Forest to the west and was stopped to the west of the village by a small group of men (the population was very small in those days) . Up to this time bushfires had traditionally been kept away from the mountain by small burns (now would be called small hazard reductions), burning a bit here and a bit there each year, and by local logging in what was then State Forest. My father had learned from his father-in-law how to manage fire. He in turn had learned it from the old men who originally settled the area who had learned from the local aboriginals. Fire was seen as a renewal, not as destruction.

My heart has been broken by the destruction these fires of last summer have wrought. We were fortunate not to lose our home, others nearby not as fortunate. The bush has been decimated and wildlife destroyed. IT SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED AND CAN NEVER BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN AGAIN.

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

HAZARD REDUCTION

- More hazard reduction is required, preferably using a mosaic pattern of burning.
- The HRs undertaken need to be more frequent, and hence not as hot, causing less impact on the environment. For example, Kurrajong Heights RFS, aided by other brigades, undertook a backburn/HR on Sunday 22 December, after fire threatened to impact the mountain on Saturday 21. Conditions for a backburn/HR were definitely not within 'guidelines' set forth by RFS HO, but to protect the community it was deemed necessary. This was a slow burn, mainly at ground level, fire not reaching the canopy. The day after this fire the birds were back in the trees and less than a month later the tree ferns were sending out fronds, the natives were shooting at ground level and now, almost 5 months later that bush is looking more pristine than it has for years.

NATIONAL PARKS

- At Kurrajong Heights we are surrounded by both the Blue Mountains and Wollemi National Parks and there has simply not been enough focus on reducing the fuel loads in the parks.
- The fire trails in the parks need to be kept viable. It's a poor use of valuable resource waiting until a Section 44 is announced to undertake clearing and implementation of fire trails.

1.2 Preparation and planning

- Local RFS brigades need more autonomy to manage their immediate environment. There also needs to be less bureaucracy and paperwork for the local brigade to implement fire plans.
- Local brigades need the authority to order landowners to clear property.

1.3 Response to bushfires

- Fires Near Me was next to useless as it did not indicate active fire conditions – Gospers Mountain and the Grose Valley fires each appeared as a blob and it was impossible to tell where the fire was spreading. For example, on the afternoon of Saturday December 21 it showed the Grose Valley fire well to the west of us at Patersons Ridge Fire Trail when in fact it was almost to the foot of the mountain. People need accurate information to be able to make decisions on when to evacuate, when to turn on sprinklers, etc.
- Live Traffic was vague on where there were road closures. Police were somewhat inflexible when it came to blocking roads and not allowing residents to return to properties when the fire was still some distance away. My husband and I only left the house together from early November so as not to be separated if the road was closed.

1.4 Any other matters

- If Fire & Rescue personnel are going to be deployed without a local RFS brigade they need to be better trained in bush fire control. From what I understand their main focus is urban/building fires and they are ill-prepared for facing an inferno. This is in no way the fault of the personnel on the fire ground, but a lack of foresight in their training.

- Dangerous trees need to be removed from roadsides to allow safe egress in case of fire.

Supporting documents or images
