

## Your details

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**Title**

Ms

**First name**

Julie

**Last name**

Mills

## Submission details

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**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

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**Your story**

We live on an isolated road to the coast, 15 minutes south of Moruya. We were advised to evacuate 4 times over the fire period. We evacuated once (January 3 and 4) and stayed to fight a fire which took hold on the next door property on Jan 16. This started from an ember which blew from 13 km to the nearest fire front in the line of wind.

Ensure ABC funding is adequate: It was our lifeline in regional Australia and provided our only tangible and constant guidance as to where fires were and what we should be doing.

- Cessation of logging ENTIRELY in state forestry land. Ninety percent of State Forest land has been burnt. The extraction of timber from the Estate is unconscionable and should cease immediately. Any surviving wildlife needs such live refuges that have survived.
- NPWS is seriously underfunded and 'on its knees'. NPWS land also suffered ninety percent burning and weed and feral animal ingress is a very real danger which NPWS are talking of. This is our natural estate, It needs to be projected far better now that so little is left in our region and NSW more generally.

## Re 16 January Fire at Meringo.

A: This fire is now confirmed as having started as a spot fire from an ember from a fire front 13 km to the Northwest of the site (RFS confirmation). There were at least 4 other spot fires that day downwind of the fire front, but this was the only one which was not caught before it took hold in the landscape (confirmed with [REDACTED], Brigade Captain Bingi RFS from her post fire analysis). Kevin [REDACTED] rang 000 when we sighted it. 000 was rung a further 4 times (at least) by Jason [REDACTED], Paul (Kerrie's partner), Luke [REDACTED] and by me. [REDACTED] (Bingi RFS) confirmed to me the next day that none of those calls registered on the RFS system. This highlights that there was a complete communications breakdown at RFS on that day in our region. During the course of the 5 hours when I was involved in actively fighting the fire, there was only one small Bingi RFS ute with water cart helping contain the fire. He too appears to have had no contact with Fire Control. At 9pm that night I rang Fire HQ in Moruya. No-one even answered the phone.

Recommendation: A review by RFS as to why this fire which burnt through 50 acres did not register on the RFS communications system.

Recommendation: Shouldn't someone always be present at any Fire HQ office to take calls for situations like this:

B: Fires Near Me App: This was the system we also all relied on throughout NSW during the fire season. For those of us who live in areas under threat we came to realise that the app was flawed, and was not 'real time' and nor did it register many fires that were as yet small in size. This proved to be true on 16 January when, over the course of the afternoon and evening we realised that the fire was not registering at all on the app. The app was not updated to reflect this fire till I spoke to [REDACTED] from NPWS on 22 Jan and asked if the fire was too small to be identified on the app. She was shocked and said categorically it should have been there. At her request, Will [REDACTED] and I mapped out the fire on a Google Sat image and sent an image reflecting the burnt area to her that same day. It was added to fire data within an hour.

Recommendation: Given the critical nature and role this app played in identifying fires for communities affected, it needs to be overhauled and significant rigour applied to ensure it is worthy of the trusted position with which the community viewed it.

### Local Information Sharing:

When it became clear that the region where we live was low in population (and thus fires that start up may not be seen) and many residents had evacuated (and thus fires were not necessarily going to be observed) and that 'Fires Near Me' was not reliable, a group of us formed a WhatsApp group, the objective of which was only for use to notify each other of fires. This group consisted of 10 people on high points and/or large landholdings between Moruya Heads and Bingi. Many within the group did not know others but they all agreed to participate in the interest of the group. This proved to be a highly effective tool over the month of January and February.

Recommendation: That RFS and Emergency Services recommend to communities that they take control of their own safety by adopting communication strategies such as SMS or WhatsApp groups within their own locales.

### Water trailers - in the style of the Braidwood Mosquitos

A number of residents in our area had trailers which were fitted with 1000 litre water cubes and with motor pumps. Having seen how these were being deployed in Braidwood, several of us had already discussed the fact that if fire started in our area, we would seek to take these to the fire front if we deemed it safe to do so and quell the fire before it became unmanageable. On January 16 that is precisely what occurred. By deploying 4 such carts on the back of four wheel drives, we were able to contain the spot fire that occurred and by working as a team and ensuring that as fire crept or sprung up in the gardens/homes on Woodlands Way, we were able to ensure the fire did not become uncontrollable. We were not able to extinguish the fire in tall trees but we were able to quell small breakouts and to 'corale' grass fires so they did not spread too far. None of us used the entirety of our 1000 litre cubes. Ours was only depleted by half and was in use consistently for 6 hours.

Recommendation: That communities be encouraged to build or purchase as a group or individually within 'micro communities' such trailers. They can be used for watering revegetation or garden projects for most of the year.

## Ecological Burning

On a personal note, Meringo Point Sanctuary is going to contract Braidwood Local Aboriginal Land Services to commence cultural burning project on our 40 acre project. Our objective is both to apply appropriate and ecological burning regimes on our land and to act as a demonstration project to other large land holders across the region. Over the course of the project which will be done across several sessions we will invite other interested landholders to workshops on our property to view progress and ask questions of LALS, an organisation which has been applying such burning regimes for several seasons now. The only land left unburnt on land under their tenure in the summer fires was that where the ecological burning had been undertaken for the last few years. This will be done in conjunction with Bingi RLS with whom we have discussed the proposal last month.

Recommendation: That RLS showcases projects such as that which we are undertaking so that others can become comfortable and familiar with the idea of small, low intensity, mosaic and patchwork burns undertaken according to seasonal flowering and fruiting and which allow wildlife to escape.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

## Supporting documents or images

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