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First name	Kate
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Last name	Rutherford
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I am making this submission as	Resident
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Submission type	Personal
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Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
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Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
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Consent to make submission public	Public
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Your story	<p>I have been a resident of Kangaroo Valley for the past 32 years. Over recent years I watched as our valley grew drier and drier and the fuel load on the ground became enormous. I feared that without good rain our community faced real devastation from fire. I welcomed the chance eighteen months ago to try and do something to prevent the mounting catastrophe by joining the Kangaroo Valley Community Bush Fire Committee. The aim of our committee is to provide support, education and leadership to help our community to prepare for bush fire. As it became a "when" not "if" emergency, our communities rallied in preparation. Regardless and sadly, fire came on 04.01.20. Thankfully due to the work of residents within our community no lives were physically lost. However, 50 houses, 20 holiday cottages, 70 outbuildings, memories and businesses were extinguished on that night as the Currowan Monster attacked with fiery fury.</p>
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1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

Close by to where I live is Bendeela Reserve. This is a highly popular free camp site which attracts thousands of visitors yearly. Water NSW are responsible for the area and took the initiative to close Bendeela Reserve in mid-December due to the fire risk. A LED sign was then displayed some 6 km off the main road to advise travellers that the area was closed.

Throughout the final week of December as the air grew exceedingly dry and smoky, I watched in horror as campers continued to travel past our property on route to the reserve. I worried that upon finding the reserve closed that people would seek alternative free camping spots in the nearby bush – putting themselves and residents at risk. On one evening I remember passing a couple who were “camped” on the roadside close to our home complete with cooking stove and likely set up for the night – most probably refugees from Bendeela Reserve.

I contacted Water NSW to get the LED sign moved onto the Main Rd of Kangaroo Valley which I thought would stop people travelling westwards – the direction that the fire was predicted to travel and ultimately did. They politely advised me that it was Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) responsibility to move the LED sign. I contacted SCC and received a response on the 16th January 2020 – two weeks after the fire had ravaged Kangaroo Valley and their response redirecting me back to Water NSW. Travelling home urgently from work at Berry on January 3rd, (in response to a Fires Near Me warning that the fire status at our home was now at alert level), I passed another camper van, looking for a free camping spot - oblivious to the impending doom. I told them that fire was coming and encouraged them out of the valley. When I reached home, in desperation, I phoned the Local ABC Station (97.3) who were offering to assist as the Emergency Broadcaster. I hoped that they could help with getting action on moving the sign and sending out a warning to travellers that the Currowan Monster was creeping closer to Kangaroo Valley.

The sign was never moved, and the fire arrived at 8pm the following night. Since the fire I have reflected on several other risk prone areas like Bendeela Reserve within Kangaroo Valley. Flat Rock at Upper Kangaroo Valley; Brogers Creek; Beehive Point; and Tallowa Dam. Each of these areas are unpatrolled and known free picnic / camping spots. At Flat Rock residents took direct action closing access and ordering visitors out of the area. In the future I would recommend that a more comprehensive approach by authorities to ensuring these areas are more appropriately prepared and closed off during a significant fire threat. Whilst travellers are unaware of the risks of remaining, they are unwittingly putting themselves and residents at increased danger. Strategically positioned signage and barriers to prevent access need to be fundamental. Additionally, patrolling of these risk areas, as part of a formalised fire preparation plan, should be systematically undertaken by a delegated authority when the fire warnings reach ALERT status– not a volunteer organisation or well-meaning residents – to ensure all people are kept safe.

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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