



Your details

Ms

Title

First name

Kathryn

Last name

Michie

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A member of the general public

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share my personal story, which I believe is representative of many thousands, if not millions of Australians this summer. I am making this submission as an individual. I have worked for many years on forest carbon issues in Asia-Pacific and my expertise is in balancing the synergies and trade-offs between conservation and economic development. I am also a mother to two young daughters and care deeply about the impacts of the recent bushfires on more vulnerable individuals, on NSW's economy, our unique ecosystems, and our iconic wildlife. Thank you for seriously considering the lessons learnt from the 2019-20 bushfire season so NSW can prevent and better respond to future tragedies.

I live with my young family just a few kilometres from the centre of Sydney. Our lives, home and livelihoods were safe from the immediate impacts of the bushfires, yet my and my family's health and well-being were affected for weeks.

Some first-hand examples:

- I remember walking my 6-year-old daughter to school one day in December - she just started Kindy last year. It was such a hot day, yet she carried her jumper with her. When I suggested she could leave it at home as she would not need it on such a hot day, she told me she needed it to hold over her face, as the smoke stung her eyes so badly.
- Having to tell my children we can't have a playdate in the park after school because it's too dangerous to play outside.
- Having to leave the house briefly and finding myself telling my children "Try not to breathe".
- Both children had sore throats, improving at times as the air quality improved, but then deteriorating as the wind changed and the smoke near us got worse again.
- On several occasions, I woke up in the middle of the night to the incredibly strong smell of smoke and had to check downstairs because I was sure that our home was on fire. Every morning, the first thing I did was check my AirVisual app, if it was relatively good air quality (which was always a judgement call), I would rush to open the doors and windows to get some "fresh" (this is a relative term!) air in while we had the chance.
- We noticed impacts on insect populations in our balcony garden – it was the first year since we started the garden that we did not see the native blue banded bee.
- Multiple holidays and weekends away were cancelled - a weekend in the Blue Mountains to visit friends, a camping trip. The kids were devastated each time, yet I had to remind them how lucky we were in comparison to those who were scared that they may lose their home to the fires.

This is no way to live. This is not how I want my children to grow up. If this is what it is like with 1 degree of warming, I am so scared of what it will be like if we let it get to 4 degrees.

Myself and my immediate family are all healthy, with no pre-existing conditions. The constant sore throats and stinging eyes was bad for us. I am scared of possible long-term damage to my children's' growing lungs. How bad was it for people with asthma?

I have no history of anxiety or mental health issues, but I awoke each day during the bushfire crisis with a feeling of fear and unease.

The above hasn't touched on the intense grief experienced by myself and many others. Learning that over a billion animals across Australia perished in the bushfires was devastating. We have no technique to ascribe an economic value to this loss and the associated grief, yet it cannot be disregarded.

Yet we were the lucky ones. This is absolutely nothing compared to the devastation to homes, lives and livelihoods caused by the fires and the trauma experienced by those on the front line.

We need to urgently and drastically address climate change. The science is clear that climate change is contributing to more frequent and intense natural disasters, including bushfires.

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

Scientists have been urging action on climate change for decades, providing evidence that inaction will lead to increased frequency and severity of natural disasters like bushfires.

As just one example, in 2007, the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research provided a report (<https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=procite:5910842c-f62e-4006-b88f-1055d8e981fa&dsid=DS1>) specifically predicting that fire danger will increase by as much as 10% in Australia by 2020, and by as much as 30% by 2050, with the greatest change being expected in the northern NSW.

The scientific consensus that Australia is facing a climate crisis is indisputable. The crisis needs to be acknowledged and significant, urgent action taken to drastically reduce our emissions and provide resources for adaptation for the impacts that are already locked in.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The response to the 2019-20 bushfires was inadequate. An event of this severity was forecast by experts, we should have been better prepared. We should have taken action on climate change decades ago, but the next best time to take action is now.

The bushfire crisis is just one example of how the cost of inaction on climate change far outweighs that of being proactive.

I am strongly supportive of learning from Indigenous Australians' expertise in traditional land and fire management practices. These approaches must be led by Indigenous People and should be not seen as a "silver bullet" but considered in the context of broader relationships with Land and Country. I urge you to pay careful attention to any submissions made by Indigenous organisations and listen to their expertise – and to seek out this information in a culturally appropriate way if formal submissions have not been received.

The safety of front line fire fighters needs to be the priority. We need to properly resource communication devices, protective equipment, and enough support/capacity so that they can take breaks and rest. Their voices need to be listened to and their recommendations from their first hand experience considered, while being mindful of the trauma that they have experienced.

I urge for better planning for wildlife rescue to safely remove animals from the path of danger wherever possible. We also need to resource coordinated responses to provide surviving wildlife with access to water and food after the fire has moved through the area and continue this support while the habitat recovers. This needs to be part of better planning and investments in protecting Australia's threatened species.

We all – Government, media and the general public - need to listen to scientists. There is incredible expertise in Australia, and science needs to be the basis of rigorous, evidence-based policy.

1.4 Any other matters

The most critical issue is to take urgent action to reduce Australia's emissions in a coordinated way, with action at both the State and Federal levels. As a wealthy country with one of the highest per capita emissions, we have a responsibility to lead the way on this and encourage other countries to take drastic action to mitigate climate change. With abundant wind and sun resources, Australia should be a world leader (and even exporter) of renewable energy. There are so many opportunities for reducing Australia's emissions through reducing deforestation (ironically, including through reducing fire risk), regenerative agriculture, protecting blue-carbon ecosystems such as seagrass, mangrove and saltmarsh. We have the technical

expertise and solutions available to us – we just need the political will to implement these solutions at scale.

We must choose to invest heavily in these solutions urgently, else we are facing a world with more frequent and destructive natural disasters. I never want to experience a bushfire season like what we experienced in 2019-20 summer, yet I fear without urgent action on climate change, it will be even worse.

Thank you.

Supporting documents or images
