



Title	Mrs
First name	Kaye
Last name	Whitbread
I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>Blue Mountains Bushfire, December 21, 2019. I am a resident of Bell in the upper Blue Mountains. The Gosper's Mountains Fire to the north-west had been burning for nearly two months. A second fire started at Mt. Victoria to the south on the Victoria Falls Road. On Armistice Day, I elected not to attend a service, it was a TOAL FIRE BAN DAY here. From that day on, I started preparing my property. I had already been watering down my property (2000 sq. Metres) to ensure that it was greened-up in case of ember attack. I have tank water supplemented by a bore. THERE WAS A DROUGHT. I HAD BEEN DRINKING BORE WATER FOR MONTHS AND MONTHS. On Friday, December 20, another TOTAL FIRE BAN DAY, I started clearing my property against the fire from the south. At about 1.00 pm, I decided to "leave early". It had never been my intention to stay and defend. I'm 70 years old and disabled and have suffered a stroke. My neighbour assured me he would look after my home for me. It is fitted with roof sprinklers which run off the bore which is powered</p>

by mains power or by a huge generator. I left home only to arrive at the corner of my street at the Bell's Line of Road in Bell to be told that a fire had now started to the west and the road was closed. I was trapped. The road to the east was closed at Bilpin due to a fire there and the Darling Causeway was closed due to the Victoria Falls fire and now, fire in Lithgow closing that road. I returned home and waited. I was panicking, I rang my family in the Illawarra and in the Riverina to say goodbye. I thought I could die. I've been a RFS member for 29 years and knew how bad it was. My brother in the Riverina took charge. He calmed me down, we talked, we decided that I had to ring the police to try to evacuate me. This I did and eventually a Lithgow Police Car arrived and escorted me through the fire to Lithgow. I have a scanner, my late husband was a Senior Deputy Captain and the scanner allowed him to monitor from home. I took it with me and on the Saturday afternoon, I listened as the fire roared into Bell from the south. It had crossed the Darling Causeway and roared towards Bell on the western side. I knew we had lost homes. I didn't know how many or whose homes they were. We actually lost one third of our homes here, but thankfully NO LIVES WERE LOST. I returned home three days later by bluffing my way through a road block. I knew my home was safe, my neighbour had told me. I bluffed my way through as I felt that if the UNTRAINED REPORTERS FROM CHANNEL 9 IN SYDNEY COULD BE FILMING MY NEIGHBOUR'S PROPERTY, WHY COULDN'T I, AS A TRAINED RFS MEMBER WITH 29 YEARS EXPERIENCE BE ALLOWED HOME. The roof sprinklers saved my home. The cost of the bore, the generator and the sprinklers was over \$22,000.00 but having recently lost my husband and with my degree of illness and disability I knew I couldn't stay and fight a fire hence it was money well spent. Three and a half months on, we are still cleaning up. Laing O'Rourke only arrived here 2 weeks ago. When I was contacted and asked what assistance I required which was removal of enormous trees and shrubs, I was told that NO, WE DON'T DO THAT. WE ONLY REMOVE STRUCTURES THAT ARE DAMAGED. THAT ISN'T WHAT I WAS TOLD WHEN I LODGED AN "IN PERSON" APPLICATION WITH SERVICE NSW IN LITHGOW IN EARLY JANUARY. I have already paid out nearly \$3,000.00 to have dangerous trees removed as they were impacting my roof AND NO ONE WOULD COME TO HELP. Other trees will have to wait. I don't have enough money at present to have more removed. I have had financial assistance from Red Cross which is to do repairs to my roof damaged in the fire. The lead flashing around my chimney (my home is 110 years old) melted and it wasn't until later when the heavy rain started in February that I noticed leaks inside my home. My excess is more than the damage will cost to be repaired but the money from Red Cross will cover that for me. I am really grateful for their assistance.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

A LACK OF HAZARD REDUCTION IS THE CAUSE. LISTED BELOW ARE THE AGENCIES THAT OWN OR CONTROL LAND SURROUNDING MY PROPERTY

1. NPWS
2. BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL
3. SYDNEY TRAINS
4. NSW ROADS AND MARITIME SERVICE
4. ELECTRICITY COMPANY (high tension wires are at my back fence).

NOT ONE OF THESE AGENCIES HAS KEPT UP A REGULAR HAZARD REDUCTIN PROGRAM. RFS HAS DONE NOTHING IN BELL EITHER PRIOR TO OR SINCE THE 2013 STATE MINE FIRE.

NPWS - NOT ONCE, Until 2 weeks before the 2019 fire did NPWS come anywhere near Bell. Too little too late. The drought had made the situation so much worse. Dry fire fighting ie clearing scrub by machine was undertaken but TOO LATE

NPWS and now thousands of hectares of native vegetation and thousands of animals are dead. One run through with a bull dozer was not enough.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL OWNS LAND ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF MY ROAD. THE COUNCIL HAS NEVER ONCE CLEARED THAT LAND IN THE 45 YEARS I HAVE LIVED HERE (that's the land that caused homes to be lost in this street). I used to light small piles that I raked up but was reported so stopped doing that as I was told I would be fined. COUNCIL DOES NOTHING HERE TO PROTECT US.

SYDNEY TRAINS - beyond the council land is the Main Western Railway Line. No hazard reduction is ever done in the rail corridor. It was a regular occurrence done by the fettlers but not now.

NSW ROADS AND MARITIME - Clearing of vegetation along the Bell's Line of Road and the Darling Causeway and Chifley Road is never done.

ELECTRICITY COMPANY - The easement for the high tension wires was 20 metres. 2 weeks before the December fire, slashing took place. A knee-jerk reaction. The slashed vegetation was left on the ground which created a further fire hazard to homes which are built on both sides of the easement all along Sandham Road at Bell. The poles burnt, the easement is now 40 metres wide, the vegetation has been piled up into huge windrows creating another fire hazard. JUST SHUT THE GATE AFTER THE HORSE HAS BOLTED.

1.2 Preparation and planning

WE RESIDENTS PREPARE OUR PROPERTIES. WE DO WHAT WE ARE INSTRUCTED TO DO. I HELD THE POSITION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICER, I RAN MEETINGS TO MAKE SURE PEOPLE WERE PREPARED. WE IDENTIFIED ELDERLY AND DISABLE AND INFIRM PEOPLE AND MADE SURE THEY WOULD BE LOOKED AFTER. WE DID EVERYTHING WE COULD. WE KNEW IT WOULD BE A BAD FIRE SEASON AS DID THE AUTHORITIES. WHY THEN WAS NOTHING UNDERTAKE AS FAR AS HAZARD REDUCTION UNTIL NOVEMBER WHEN THE FIRE DANGER PERIOD HAD BEEN BROUGHT FORWARD TO COMMENCE ONE MONTH EARLY ON SEPTEMBER 1. AS LANDOWNERS OR OCCUPIERS, WE DO WHAT WE CAN TO PROTECT OUR PROPERTIES. IT'S ABOUT TIME THAT THE AGENCIES THAT I HAVE LISTED DO 'THEIR BIT' TO PROTECT US, THE BUSH AND THE NATIVE ANIMALS. WE CAN ONLY DO SO MUCH AND WE DO.

1.3 Response to bushfires

I'm not sure what you want here. The response by the RFS in attending fires is exceptional here but these fires surrounding my village were too big. This was due to a lack of hazard reduction by the agencies mentioned. I have lived here for 46 years now and each fire is worse than the last.

1.4 Any other matters

RFS CAPTAINS SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR HAZARD REDUCTION IN THEIR AREA. THE ISSUING OF A PERMIT TAKES TOO LONG. THE AREA TO BE HAZARD REDUCED IS NECESSARY AT THE TIME OF THE APPLICATION AND BY THE TIME THE PERMIT IS ISSUED, IF IT IS ISSUED, THE AREA HAS BECOME A FIRE HAZARD. SIMPLIFY THE PROCESS. IF THE CAPTAIN ASSESSES THAT IT NEEDS DOING, SURELY ONE INSPECTION BY THE RFS DISTRICT OFFICE SHOULD BE ENOUGH. IT SHOULD NOT TAKE YEARS TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY PERMISSIONS. IN CLOSING, THE 52 MILLION DOLLARS RAISED TO ASSIST PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SO DREADFULLY IMPACTED THIS FIRE SEASON AND BECAUSE IT WASN'T RAISED CORRECTLY NAMED HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE RFS. THAT MONEY, IF IT CANNOT BE GIVEN TO PEOPLE SHOULD BE

SPEND ON MORE RFS STATE MITIGATION TEAMS TO ALLOW HAZARD REDUCTION PREPARATION. MORE TRUCKS, MORE EQUIPMENT ETC. BRIGADES IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS ARE WEIGHED DOWN WITH EQUIPMENT. STATE MITIGATION CREWS SITUATED AT GLENDENNING NEED MORE TRUCKS, EQUIPMENT AND CREWS. These State Mitigation Crews are also volunteer fire fighters. They deserve better as we all do. We deserve better from all levels of government as I have mentioned above.

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