



Title	Mrs
First name	Marianne
Last name	Cool
I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	Personal, and also Treading Lightly Inc.
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Vice President
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>Where to begin to tell my story, our community's story? We were under threat from the 'forever fire' or 'the beast' as some of our local fires called the 74 days of fire that threatened our communities on the south coast. Threats came from the south, the west, the north, until we were surrounded and had nowhere to go (quite daunting when your fire plan has always been to leave early). Last resort: Mollymook beach. Thankfully it never came to that for us. 14 of our direct friends and acquaintances have lost everything. Our whole community is suffering. Badly. Like many others in our community, we were fully confident that our government would 'have our back'. I cannot tell you how disappointed and shocked I was/we were (and still are!!) to find out how wrong we were with that assumption. Full praise goes to our wonderful Shoalhaven Mayor Mrs. Amanda Findley. She was a gun, cool headed; with clear communication and decision making all with a very warm heart. Local community members and not-for-profit organisations had to step in. And we did, to</p>

care for the most vulnerable in our community. To help accommodate displaced families, to care for tourists that did not (or could not) evacuate in time, to keep businesses and our local economy running, to cater for our frontline heroes. We even had to deploy local fishermen to take their boats out to Conjola and Manyana/Bendalong to evacuate children, pregnant women and older community members that were stuck on the beach without food and shelter.

Our state government and federal government? We NEVER saw them. The army? Same thing. They came AFTER the fires, when it was deemed 'safe' for a handshake and photo op. No thank you ...

The fires have now been declared 'out'. As we are trying to pick up the pieces, all we hear and see is that donations are not getting through, government promises are being broken or delayed, and there is way too much red tape for people to deal with after so much loss and hyper-vigilance for so many weeks. Having completely missed our tourist season (our most important, if not only form of meaningful income), and on top of that battling with a new crisis (COVID-19), we are bracing ourselves for more losses. Of possessions, of lives (studies show substance abuse, domestic violence and self-harm including suicide will increase exponentially), but most of all of trust and confidence in our government.

I am hopeful your independent royal commission will be able to get to the bottom of how events unfolded. What I am not confident about is whether our government will listen. Evidence from the past several Royal Commissions into bushfires (like Black Saturday) shows that it is unlikely that recommendations will be taken into account. I wish you all the best in your inquest.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Weather extremes due to climate change, a severe and ongoing drought, bad land management practises and a government that is only thinking about 'the economy', 'jobs', and winning the next election. Whatever caused these horrific bushfires, we only seem to be able to point fingers at each other, I wish we could work together and come up with real solutions

1.2 Preparation and planning

1.3 Response to bushfires

A HUGE thank you and bow to all levels of first responders. I can only imagine how hard it has been for them (and still is). An extra compliment to Commissioner Fitzsimmons for his clear leadership and communication throughout the fires. A specific mention of the ABC. When everything else failed, they were our only form of trustworthy communication and advice. They saved lives and should be supported in whatever way we can.

1.4 Any other matters

We have a fountain of knowledge in our indigenous communities on how to manage this land and fires. Its time we start listening to them.

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