

Your details

Title

Mr

First name

Martin

Last name

O'Dea

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

We were not directly affected but what we witnessed was the cascading series of problems that were a consequence of the fires. This highlighted our reliance on power and the internet and the invaluable contribution of ABC radio.

We normally holiday after Christmas at Lake Tabourie the South Coast and were considering not going as we watched with horror at yet another day of fires sweeping across NSW. Down south the fires had swept up the through the forest past Bawley Point and up to lake Tabourie pre- Christmas. The RFS did a magnificent job of holding the fires at the township border. Our friends at the camp site said it was fine if not a bit smokey – but then again so was Sydney.

We ended up going down thinking that we had a 30km fire break around us due to the fires pre-Christmas. On the 31st of January we were watching intently as the fires moved incredibly fast overnight towards Batemans bay some

50Km to the south. We couldn't really leave as the roads had cut the Princes Highway to the south and then the north.

We were in an unpowered campsite and figured we would just stay until the highway was clear to go. We were reliant on a number of apps – Bushfires near me, and the Arc GIS map, and the DEA hotspots map. These were incredibly useful to us.

Then slowly, there was a cascading series of events that shut everything down. Power went and that meant that the sewer pump out at the campground went. That meant no showers. It also meant no ice from the shop as they had no power for their fridge. The local shop had petrol, but the pumps wouldn't work without power, nor could you pay for it with the atm not working.

We still had limited internet access, and eventually the power to the phone towers went too. What we still had was power in the car and the ABC radio. It was invaluable in getting information.

When we did hear that the highway was open, we packed very early and left to find an enormous traffic queue. We slowly inched north, and reached Milton in about 3hrs – for what is normally a 45minute trip. It then picked up and we were moving very quickly until we hit the lake Conjola road and we could see a police car turning people around. There were about 30 cars in front of us. We sought information and they didn't really know. There was talk of a water bomber being called in. We didn't know if it was going to be 30 minutes or 2 hours. It turned out to be 11 hours. After waiting about 3hrs we were fortunate enough to be able to stay with friends in Mollymook.

Unlike many others experience – ours was not traumatic. The cascading series of problems that were triggered made simple things difficult. The lack of coherent information was also a problem. Understandable in a fast moving situation. At Lake Conjola road – no one could really say how long we were going to be. Again my key message is the invaluable service provided by the ABC radio.

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

The long drought compounded by climate change. The exceedingly dry landscape was a critical issue here.

1.2 Preparation and planning

I was concerned that the Prime Minister Scott Morrison did not see fit to meet with the ex RFS people, including Greg Mullins in April. The severity of this season was well foreseen by many with expertise.

An ideological stance against climate change has not helped here.

Labour had planned to commit \$80Million for additional aerial water bombers had they been elected. Why this was not done by the Liberal Government I am not sure – but showed lack of foresight.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Shane Fitzsimmons - Commissioner of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service - did a great job.

At a federal levels however - It was too late and too little. Same it seems with payments to those affected. While those directly affected by loss of life or property are priorities, many other in the communities have been suffering as business dropped off at this prime period. We would have loved to go back to the south coast after things improved in late Jan / February – but by that time our holidays were gone and we were back at work.

1.4 Any other matters

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL BURNING

Indigenous cultural burning and land management practices must be part of the future of Australia. Cool burns are a slow laborious process and ones that need a great deal of understanding of the natural landscape.

The sharing of this knowledge would be invaluable and would also provide huge employment opportunities.

There is concern that the RFS hazard reduction burns are actually contributing to the bushfire hazard not reducing it. This is by the temperature of the burns and the type of vegetation if brings back.

This video prepared by the ABC about the Tathra fires is highly valuable in explaining the complexities of the matter better than I can.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM72NtXxyLs>

CLIMATE CHANGE

Global overheating from anthropometric green house gasses is going to continue to make bushfire seasons worse. We are at about 1.2degrees above pre-industrial levels – we are on track for 3-5Degrees by 2100. Australia urgently needs to have a Climate change act and get in place urgent steps to address this.

POST FIRE LOGGING

The fires put additional pressure on logging – particularly of old growth forests. And for what – to make photocopy paper of all things.

Supporting documents or images