

Dear Professor Mary O'Kane and Mr Dave Owens,

I am making a personal submission.

I am a resident in a bushfire-affected area.

I consent to my submission being made public.

My story:

I suffered through the drought, had to evacuate to escape the fires and, a few weeks later, was flooded in, enduring plagues of insects. Nature is out of balance and it is up to us to help restore it. The fires affected me deeply. I was so angry that State and Federal Government inaction on climate change is directly responsible for the proliferating "natural" disasters we, the people, and Nature must continue to endure.

The future looks terrifying as global warming accelerates. We are culpable; we are frying the planet, destroying all its precious beauty and our irreplaceable fellow creatures. Every day the fires continued to rage was another day of heartbreak for me, thinking of all the hideous death and suffering. Governments will be remembered for the legacy of wanton neglect of solutions to the greatest catastrophe humanity has faced. Our children and grandchildren will blame policy and decision-makers.

1. There is no doubt climate change is influencing the occurrence of megafires in Australia and elsewhere. It is nothing short of terrifying that the fires were so savage that they consumed rainforest, which, in the past, before the effects of climate change, could be relied on to impede fire progress. We are facing a gravely alarming future and we must act.

The bushfires burnt nearly 20 million hectares nation-wide, at least 5.4 million hectares in NSW alone, caused 35 tragic deaths of people from fire and over 400 more from smoke exposure, and the deaths of over a billion innocent, helpless animals.

According to research by the World Weather Attribution Network, fire danger conditions were made four times more severe by human-caused climate change, and further unchecked greenhouse pollution will multiply fire risk unless urgent action is taken now.

Strategic well-placed hazard reduction was certainly very helpful, but is not a panacea in severe to catastrophic fire weather conditions. Windows of opportunity for safe hazard reduction burning are closing; there is a need to look for other means of risk reduction. Severe natural hazard events are now more frequent, extensive and cascading. Government is accountable as long as it fails to take action on the causes of climate change: action such as transitioning towards renewable energy sources and encouraging and facilitating a reduction in animal agriculture.

CO2 takes 100 years to break down, whereas the greenhouse gases emitted by animal agriculture decline after 12 years. Therefore, reducing animal agriculture can make a more rapid impact on slowing climate change.

We have the resources, wherewithall and technology to phase out polluting energy generators and substitute renewables in the next ten years. If the Government consulted with former fire chiefs and emergency leaders and declared a climate emergency, a comprehensive plan to tackle the crisis, its causes and exacerbating factors could be developed. We need leadership that truly cares about protecting citizens and the environment instead of only representing the interests of coal barons. Climate change should not be politicised.

No one should have to endure the terror of facing such an unprecedented conflagration. Too many lost

everything and had their communities shattered. Millions of farm animals were trapped by fences and burned alive. Millions of precious native animals were incinerated. Government inaction contributed to the scale and severity of this disaster.

And the climate disasters will continue. Unless we learn and change, innocent people, animals, and Nature will pay the ghastly price of heedlessness and greed. All parties should unite to help us battle the continuing disaster that confronts us and strive to heal community and country.

2. The bottom line is that we were under-prepared and under-resourced. What is needed is a systematic planned approach and a commitment to increased funding. The fact that \$40 million was recently ripped out of fire funding is unconscionable.

Generous volunteers and donors have made magnificent contributions, but the protection of people, property and communities and our unique flora and fauna, during crisis and recovery, is a government responsibility and funded systems and organisations should be put in place. We cannot simply rely on charities to do the vital work of looking after citizens and wildlife.

The National Parks strive to protect our natural heritage when fire threatens, as well as human life and property. They have the expertise but need increased resources to tackle fire in bushland, which could assist in lessening the danger of large firefront development, as they have the training to fight fires in difficult terrain. The primary cause of this season's fires (75%) was lightning ignitions in remote areas.

Management plans need to cover periods of 20 - 30 years, as some forests take so long to recover, but current plans happen over intervals that are too short for genuine natural heritage protection. Management needs to be tailored for individual environments, but practices such as area amalgamations, result in areas that are too large to be successfully cared for.

We need a reversal of the Coalition's staff and resources cuts to National Parks. When a senior NPWS fire behaviour and management specialist is made redundant, a wealth of knowledge and experience is lost. Fire management specialists should have the opportunity to share comprehensive and detailed understanding of fire behaviour, management and planning with colleagues, firefighters and community and youth groups. Community education in fire behaviour, management and mitigation would assist our preparedness for increasingly damaging fire seasons.

3. The response to the 2019/20 fires seemed extemporised and ad hoc. Resources and personnel need to be increased to facilitate liaison between all levels of government, agencies and parties, e.g: between NPWS and landholders, etc. With megafires breaking out in more than one state at a time, resources can be shared but each state must have their own so as to be self-sufficient in times of simultaneous crisis. Commitment of aircraft was too slow and met outdated National Aerial Firefighters Centre recommendation levels that were outstripped by increasing needs.

ADF resources were deployed too little too late. The catastrophe of this fire was a war for which we should have been prepared. Our gallant firefighters were exhausted and the fit young men & women of our forces (not just Reservists) should have been deployed from the start. Some military personnel are already trained in fire-fighting and it would not be an insurmountable hurdle to quickly train up more of such efficient units to be in a permanent state of readiness to battle the enemy that is bushfire. Others could be deployed in tasks such as clearing roads, organising evacuations, etc. More military craft and equipment should be on hand to be seconded.

4. Wildlife and ecosystems

It is imperative we have a properly planned, co-ordinated and resourced approach to wildlife and habitat protection and recovery. Fully-funded projects such as *Hot Spots* should be developed state-wide.

Recently, in NSW, the state government declared a koala habitat protection zone in an area where no scientific sightings of koalas had been made. At the same time, Forest Corp. is clear-felling known koala habitat.

Our wildlife, including vulnerable, threatened and endangered species, have been devastated and habitat destroyed by this disaster, this Armageddon. A moratorium on native forest logging would leave forests and habitat refuges for the surviving wildlife. Contracts include a *force majeure* clause which can be invoked in these unprecedented conditions.

We have a responsibility to our unique wildlife and a responsibility to cultivate rich biodiversity. Thousands of koalas have died but it's appalling to think that while megafires have ravaged koala habitat, Forestry Corp can be allowed to continue logging as many trees as they possibly can. We must suspend all logging operations and conduct a comprehensive post-fire wildlife and habitat assessment across all land tenures.

We must protect all threatened species habitat and high conservation value land from further destruction.

Logging is known to increase the risk of bushfires, with logged forest much drier and log dumps providing reserves of fuel that can intensify fires.

For the sake of safety of our community and the protection of our flora, fauna and ecosystems, it is time to implement a ban on the unnecessary logging of native forests. Government needs to provide financial and employment support to logging workers and mill operators while forests regenerate and wildlife recovers. Meanwhile, we can readily transition to plantation timber which already supplies most of our needs.

6. It is vital to understand that each landscape needs to be treated individually, so we need national and state-wide co-ordination but also targeted approaches based on local understanding of each microcosm, each area. Indigenous people and fire experts understand that each microclimate, each ecosystem, has specific fire management needs. Different regions need to be burnt in different seasons; some require 7 year intervals, some 20. Dry forests, if burned too often, lose the biodiversity that makes them more fire resistant.

Ecosystems need restoration and rejuvenation, not indiscriminate incineration. The danger is that the recent tragedy will elicit a knee-jerk reaction of wholesale hazard reduction burning that is ill-considered. For example: If HR burns are too hot, seed banks and soil microorganisms are destroyed. Once burnt, it takes 100 years for soil to restore its chemistry. A burn that is not cool is counter-productive as it favours generation of weeds, such as lantana, which are more fire-prone than the biodiverse bush, and dries out the country, making it more susceptible to burning. The protection of our bush will better protect our communities.

Altered policies that allow fire brigades to support landholders to carry out control burns in safe times and conditions, with a more streamlined approval or licence process, would reduce hazard, educate landholders and give opportunities for new firefighters to gain experience before the danger period.

We also need to listen to the wisdom of our indigenous people and learn from their sophisticated cultural burning practices, which consider the fauna, flora and the individual needs of differing ecological communities. Their methods protect biodiversity and the more biodiverse an ecological community is, the more fire resistant it is. On the other hand, hazard reduction burns at too frequent intervals dry out the bush and make it more fire prone.

We need the political will for these indigenous practices to be systematically researched, revived and restored. Organisations such as *Firesticks* must be adequately funded so that cultural burning can be carried out on private and public land. Not only is cultural burning excellent land management, it provides employment opportunities that foster culture and the pride of our First Nations people.

9. A permanent military capacity on stand-by must be arranged with the federal Government.

Yours faithfully,

Ms Mary Forbes



