



Your details

Ms

Title

First name

Merinda

Last name

Turton

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

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

I live in Bargo NSW where a number of houses were burned in December 2019, including one that was only two blocks from my home. This was the Green Wattle Creek fire, that burned as close to my house as two houses away. We were evacuated twice. Most of the nearby bushland was devastated by the extreme intensity of the fire. The most distressing aspect of this tragic destruction was that it actually burned across to us from the Buxton/Balmoral inferno that originated from an escaped black-burn and resulted in the death of two firefighters. I also own a 300-acre property in the northeastern Capertee Valley with its cliffed northern, eastern and southern boundaries adjoining Wollemi National Park. In December 2019, this property was burned by the Gospers Mountain fire. Most buildings were saved by neighbours from the local Bogee brigade, although the house septic tank, a shed, some water tanks, a tank stand and a vehicle tyre were burnt. Both bush and wildlife were devastated. We had to jury-rig emergency water supplies for birds and

wildlife. A Lithgow wildlife care organisation provided bags of pellets, bales of hay and large bags of carrots to leave out for wildlife. Our remote cameras recorded numbers of individuals of a number of different species utilising these supplies. These numbers have gradually decreased over the months as some after-fire recovery has begun and rain has fallen.

My niece owns a small property in Dargan where a number of houses were burned in her street. Once again, the fire here was the result of an escaped black-burn that also burned Mt Wilson, Bilpin and the Grose Valley, causing unnecessary devastation.

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

Undoubtedly the severity, intensity and widespread extent of this last summer's bushfires was exacerbated by the extended dry spell/drought that preceded them. This meant that the bush was very dry and thus more susceptible to fire, even bush with a light fuel load.

Science has already warned us that human-induced climate change has increased the unpredictability, frequency, intensity and severity of weather events such as droughts, storms, floods, cyclones, strong winds and bushfires.

A third cause of specific destructive fires was undoubtedly the escape of very poorly-timed and implemented back-burns (eg just before days of high wind). For example, a back-burn supposedly to protect Buxton and Balmoral from the Green Wattle Creek fire escaped and caused deaths, property destruction and wildlife devastation. Similarly, another poorly-timed back-burn designed to protect Mt Wilson escaped with devastating effects on Mt Wilson, Bilpin and Dargan.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Given the current regime of droughts, floods, storms and other climate-change induced weather, planning and preparation for future bushfire seasons certainly need attention.

Firstly the declared non-burning season should be extended, as should the length of the summer bushfire season. Both need to be widely publicised.

Secondly education about fire use and fire safety needs to be improved and more widely publicised, especially during the bushfire season.

Thirdly back-burning must be much more carefully designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated both before, during and after each back-burn. Fire experts including RFS staff, fire scientists, wildlife ecologists, weather experts and NPWS staff all need to be involved in this.

Fourthly well-planned off-season controlled burning designed specifically for property protection needs to be part of a comprehensive winter plan to help summer bushfire response.

The same experts outlined above must be involved.

Fifthly monitoring of bushland during the fire season needs to be ramped up considerably. This way incipient fires could be spotted and extinguished in a timely manner before they burn into uncontrollable super fires. Economic expertise would be needed to assess the viability of various monitoring systems by comparing costs of ongoing in-season monitoring with combined costs of fire fighting, property destruction, loss of life and economic losses caused by fires that have reached out-of-control status.

A few monitoring suggestions that would apply only to the bushfire season could include an App that allows citizens to easily report fire sightings in any area of bushland to RFS, a

reversion to the olden-times method that built fire towers with extensive views manned 24 hours a day by human watchers, or daily grid-pattern fire-spotting flights over large areas of bushland.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Apart from some ill-conceived poorly-timed back-burns, this summer's response to the devastating fire season we just experienced was outstanding. Volunteers together with permanent firefighters and other responsible authorities all worked tirelessly for five months. As well, both Shane Fitzsimmons and Gladys Berejiklian did a wonderful job in their calm and sympathetic daily (sometimes twice daily) briefings to keep the public up-to-date and informed about the progress of fire fronts, evacuation areas, fire-fighting responses and government assistance.

1.4 Any other matters

Fire experts including fire scientists, wildlife ecologists, NPWS staff and RFS experts must be paid to work together (especially off-season) to analyse and plan all future bushfire preparation and planning. Post-bushfire responses need quicker and better coordination. For example, clearing away of burnt rubbish such as destroyed houses and other buildings should not take four months before it happens.

Supporting documents or images
