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I am making this submission as	Other
Submission type	Organisation
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	National Parks Association, Milton Branch
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	President
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>Member of NPA Milton live throughout the Shoalhaven and we have all been impacted by the bushfires. Some of us lost houses, some lost sheds and gardens and all of us lost our beloved bushland where we go walking and observing each week. The fire broke out in the Currowan State Forest and was burning west of the Princes Highway for days. We walked from Bawley Point to Pretty Beach on the 1st of December with blue sky over the ocean and a bushfire sky over the west. Members remarked that they hoped that Murramarang Park would be spared. When we finished our walk, our phones went off with alerts to leave the area and that night or next morning the fire was in Murramarang National Park and soon the paths that we had walked on were burnt. We scrambled to find out whether members in the communities of Bawley Point and Kioloa were saved and their houses still standing. That scenario played out over and over</p>

again as other communities came into the path of the fire.

The fire expanded rapidly, sending its tentacles into all directions merging with the Tianjarra fire and giving rise to the Morton Fire, Charley Forest Fire and Monga Fire. Another fire, the Comberton fire, burnt south of Nowra and east of the Princess Highway. All National Parks in the Shoalhaven have burned.

There is enormous grief in our community. Grieving for all the different ecosystems that we lost, especially the rainforest pockets that burnt out and the many old trees that came down or had to be cut down. Grieving for all the wildlife lost and the silence of the bush is haunting us all. We are fearful of how much more will be lost due to the loss of habitat and due to logging and clearing of bush that is not burnt or is slowly recovering.

We have not been able to return to the National Parks to see what is left and what needs to be done. We have been told that it will take many months before it will be safe to walk and many years before all the infrastructure is back in place. We expect that we see local extinctions and that some of the magic places will be lost forever.

This is of course on the top of the grief that is in the community because of losses of lives and possessions. There is not one member that would not be affected by these fires.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Drought had dried out the understory, the organic litter and the soil and subsoil. The bush was incredibly stressed even before the fires. The temperatures had been above average for the last 10 years with the mean temperature in the Shoalhaven in 2019 being the highest on record and the rainfall very much below the average.

We have increasing levels of CO₂ each year, which causes the climate to change; evident as drier and hotter weather for longer periods of the year and more storms with dry lightning. This is the root cause of our devastating fire season with fires that behaved in a way never seen before and burnt over an area never experienced before.

Additionally, logging in the State Forests dries out the forests as does land clearing. Forest operations leave piles of dead wood in the logged compartments.

There was limited capacity to control the Currowan fire very early and very vigorously. There were fires in many areas of NSW and resources were stretched. Calls before the fire season by ex-fire chiefs for extra aerial resources went unheard. Aerial firefighting was hampered by low visibility and strong winds and aerial resources were very stretched.

The focus, with multiple large fires in NSW and broad fire fronts, was on protecting houses and critical infrastructure, leaving no capacity to respond to a new fire, or spot fires in a more remote area or in an area where there was no immediate threat to houses or infrastructure.

Backburning didn't seem to work and the fire front that destroyed Yatte Yattah, Conjola Park, Conjola National Park and Narrawallee Nature Reserve was most likely the result of a backburn started the day before that was not extinguished and flared up in the catastrophic condition the day after. Backburning seemed to put more fire into the landscape and enlarge the perimeter rather than control the spread of the fire.

1.2 Preparation and planning

NPA Milton is concerned that there is no plan to protect unique and endangered ecological communities (flora and fauna) in the

Shoalhaven from bushfires or a plan how to mitigate the potential of fire damage. There are many critically endangered species that are only found in our area and while they are not as well-known as the Wollemi Pines, they nevertheless need and deserve similar protection.

The attitude seems to be that fires are a natural phenomenon in National Parks, without considering that, with our changed climate, we are experiencing fires in areas such as rainforests, gullies and tall wet forests that have never burnt before. Conservation of biodiversity and of critically endangered species need to be part of planning and preparation and sufficient resources need to be available to protect those areas.

NPWS has an essential role in identifying high conservation areas, planning on how to protect these and implementing protection. To be able to do that their staffing needs to be increased substantially and specialist/ experts in fire management re-instated and consistent funding needs to be available.

The Milton area in the Shoalhaven has seen wildfires in the Kingiman ranges in 2017, Kings Point/ South Ulladulla in 2018 and a hazard reduction fire that got out of control on the Little Forest Plateau, Morton National Park and extended into the Martin's Ridge Road area. These fires occurred in the cooler seasons. The Currowan Fire reburnt some of those areas and the previous wildfires and hazard reduction burns did not offer much protection, especially on the days with severe fire weather, when the fires travelled very quickly and crowned the trees and produced their own weather.

We consider that increased and more frequent hazard reduction burns are not the panacea that would ensure a wildfire can be contained. Frequent and extensive hazard reduction burns favour plants that thrive after fires and that are very flammable. This is detrimental to rainforest communities and tall wet forests, which often provide a natural fire break during wildfires that occur outside of extreme drought conditions.

The National Park and Wildlife Service has been accused by many in our community of not carrying out sufficient hazard reduction burns and this is seen as a significant cause to the wide spread devastation of the Currowan Fire. This is a false perception, the NPWS has conducted its prescribed burns as best as possible with the resources available and carries no responsibility for the drought or for the ever diminishing window of opportunity to reduce fuel load.

There is also a perception that 'greenies' and arsonists are responsible for the fires. Again, this a false perception. Most fires were a result of dry lightning strikes.

It is of utmost importance that the facts and science of the causes of these fires are made clear to our community and to decision makers.

1.3 Response to bushfires

There were insufficient resources to fight all those fires on the eastern coast of NSW and we realise that it would never be possible to have sufficient resources with that many fires alight. The question is, could any of these fires have been extinguished when they were in their initial stages? Would a professional, highly specialised and well-resourced unit with planes, helicopters, drones and all terrain trucks have been able to extinguish or control some of those fires? Even if only a small proportion of the fires could have been controlled earlier, the extent of forests burnt in NSW would have been much less.

There is only limited government focus on the devastation to the

natural environment and the creatures therein. The destruction of wildlife habitat is a national disgrace and needs urgent, well-funded remediation.

Immediately after the bushfires there was no plan or coordinated action to address the plight of burnt, displaced or starving wildlife. It was the community that responded to the crisis as best as they could with the very limited knowledge available and with limited resources. There was confusion as to what is best practice and often emotions spilled over.

Planning should include a post fire action plan that includes how to support wildlife, including critically endangered species and wildlife found at the urban fringes. Funding needs to be available to implement such a plan immediately after the fire.

The drying of the forests needs to be addressed through a clear and well researched approach to prevent large scale clearing and continued logging. A theme of nature as our enemy is emerging and is coming from various sources advocating broad scale land clearing and continued logging.

It is paramount that we protect our natural environment and the infrastructure that allows us to learn about and enjoy nature. It is vital that we protect unburnt refugia (from further fires, from logging and from clearing) to ensure the survival of species and to ensure the economic survival of our community. Nature is our number one asset and if nature disappears, so do the jobs and the revenue for this region.

Most of all we need to acknowledge and address the role of climate change as a factor of drying out our land, causing more storms with dry lighting, causing more days with high and extreme fire dangers, causing longer fire seasons and thus causing more frequent and more severe wildfires.

We need to see the same vigorous and funded approach as the governments are applying to the present Covid 19 crisis. The risks are just as great – deaths, destruction, ill health, and economic loss. We need a healthy environment to have healthy people and a prospering community.

1.4 Any other matters

Upload files

1-Old-woodpiles-Yadboro-State-Forest.jpg - [Download File](#)
2-Logging-debris-Yadboro-State-Forest-Nov-19.jpg - [Download File](#)
3-Recent-Logging-Mess-Yadboro-State-Forest-Nov-19.jpg - [Download File](#)



Post Logging mess and left over woodpiles. Off the Great Western Distributor opposite Long Gully Road and adjacent to Morton National Park. Photo taken 16/11/19



Post Logging mess. Off Western Distributor adjacent to Morton National Park. Photo taken 16/11/19

Text



**Old woodpiles in State Forest, adjacent
to track 441/1 off the Great Western
Distributor in Yadboro Forest,
compartment 441, photo taken on
16/11/2019**