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I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal

Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	

Consent to make submission public	Public
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Your story	<p>I am a cultural fire practitioner from Yuin Walbunja Country (south coast) with understandings in natural fire occurrence and traditional fire engagement. I have developed a strong relationship with Yuin Country through kinship and Caring for Country responsibilities. I have worked in fire management within the public sector and as a previous front-line fire fighter and fire mitigation planning. I have over 20 years' experience in environmental conservation management in NSW.</p> <p>My Country, Yuin Country has been severely impacted by wildfire incidents that have occurred this summer. I have deep concerns how Country is being managed through a western framework that disconnects people's relationship and interaction with Country. Indigenous Fire knowledge has been applied to the Australian landscapes for thousands of years, this interaction maintained healthy Country where high intensity destructive fires were absent. Our local Aboriginal stories have no recognition of massive wildfires that destroyed landscapes, harming people and</p>
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killing wildlife. It has been within the last century that wild fire destruction has emerged through western practice of a managing Country framework.

It is through my understanding and knowledge's of both Indigenous fire knowledge and conservation land management that I inherit a responsibility to engage western management systems with Indigenous knowledge to protect our communities, our plants, our animals and our people. I am undertaking this journey as an educator connecting knowledge systems and practice, through engaging local Traditional Owners, government agency, academic institutes, local non-Indigenous communities and our youth.

To question the current fire management approach of hazard reduction burning, I quote simple it is non effective, the practice accumulates higher fuel loads leading to more intense fire activity. It has now become a repetitive activity and fuel loads will continue to grow through this process. This activity has become life threatening and places front line fire fighters at greater risk and reducing wild fire suppression effectiveness.

I strongly advocate for a reform of the structural approaches to bushfire management in NSW. This reform is relevant for each of the Inquiry's 11 focus points listed in the Inquiry's ToR document. The reform that I support is to reinstate Aboriginal caring for Country systems and knowledges, within an Aboriginal-led approach and framework. Such an approach would impact on and benefit the people and environment of NSW.

I call for immediate and long-term resourcing of Aboriginal-led caring for Country initiatives. Any such initiatives must be locally specific and culturally appropriate.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry. I hope that this submission contributes to the development of more effective bushfire management. I would be pleased to participate in future discussion forums on this topic and provide my contact details for that purpose.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Fire in the Australian landscape is a natural process, it has interacted for many thousands of years and it will continue to do so through natural lightning strike ignition and human fire interaction. The Currowan catastrophic fire of this summer was introduced naturally through lightning, our response and accumulation of fuel was human interactions. Through lightning there is no control and predictability were ignition will occur. Human interaction was the response, the suppression effort and fuel load management.

The contributing factor was western land management, there has been a huge reduction in a gentle fire application approach, fire fuel loads accumulated to extreme levels, fire frequency intervals were extended that created less or no fire activity patterns across the landscape. High fire fuel loads, much greater than previous decades, formed higher fire intensity. The accumulation and connectivity of high fuel loads was aided by climatic conditions supporting increased fire move-ability and intensity.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Preparation and planning were reactive, a response to wildfire activity and undertaken within an incident management framework as an emergency engagement. The planning was a response to the fire behavior, the preparation was well short. This requiring long term commitment with preventative activity that reduces fire intensity. To analyse the preparation its needs to be viewed over longer periods leading up to wildfire situations, most preparedness was in effective towards wildfire protection. This critiques the current fire management approach, much more investment needs application for preparedness, which includes Indigenous burning practices across broad landscapes. The current fire management is not suited to the environmental conditioning of the landscape with a reduction of low intensity fire patterns creating more fire prone land mass.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The response needs rigorous investigation, I severely question the approach to the wildfire suppression activity. Protecting life and property was a tremendous effort by agencies and is acknowledged and respected. The effort for fire containment and extinguishable needs to be measured against the negative impacts of the activity and its effectiveness.

Hard line containment areas did not hold the severity of the fire. Back burning operations increased the wild fire volume, the measure of this impacts needs distribution for transparency and accountability. The methodology of applying greater fire volumes to active high intensity fire increases the verosity and destructiveness. This is highly evident across the landscape through fire scarring and habitat destruction.

The effectiveness of back burning needs to be displayed in terms of effectiveness and the damage accumulated as a result of back burning operations. How many back burns got away, how much did back burning increase the verosity and volume of wild fire, how much destruction did they cause.

Broadcasting media tells stories of back burning operation within hours and minutes of catastrophic weather conditions, increasing the volume of fire under those conditions appears absurd. The activity creating greater risk and question the decision-making process, why and for what outcome?

I strongly recommended the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry undertake the action below and make information available on request

Map the volume of back burning operations, what were the impacts of the operation, measuring environmental damage and property loss, and how the back burns interacted with the wild fire with aiding wild fire suppression objectives.

1.4 Any other matters

Recovery and Response, now that the fire trucks have gone, where to from here with the aftermath. Landscapes and communities need healing and what future surround current fire management. In the led up to wild fire events Indigenous fire knowledge has not been inclusive and respected. This ancient knowledge system is well placed to interact, inform and support current fire management practices in NSW that have proven ineffective and harmful to the environment.

We need collaborative development of Indigenous fire practitioner teams to undertake fire stewardship to protect landscape from harmful fire. Our landscapes need recovery and healing through fire application, that action is required now, not when the next wild fire consumes us. We have the opportunity right now to apply Indigenous knowledge and reinstate cultural fire practices that heal the land, maintains healthy ecosystem balance and protect people and place.

Measure the financial cost towards wild fire response, calculate a preventative investment towards wildfire reduction by reducing fire intensity capacity to account the feasibility approach in preparedness investment against the costs of wild fire response.

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