



Title	Ms
First name	Renae
Last name	Kelly
I am making this submission as	Other
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>My five year old son and I were staying at my parents property, [REDACTED], Surf Beach, 2536 when the bushfires hit Batemans Bay on New Years Eve.</p> <p>At about 8:30pm on the 30/12 the predicted fire/ember path for the next day was issued. Even though their property did not fall in either the predicted fire or ember range there was a fire 21 kms away my parents home, the Clyde Mountain Fire (previously also known as the Currowan Fire) . We took time that night to discuss the predictions, looking at the weather and expected wind conditions, it appeared that we would be fine and the fire would not impact the property as per the official prediction.</p> <p>At 2:18 am I was awake and on messenger with a friend discussing the fires, I actually took screenshots to show her where the fire was, at that time it hadn't moved and there were no additional notifications.</p> <p>I woke just after 6 am on the 31/12 and read a text message sent</p>

at 6:02 from emergency services to say there was a bushfire at Mogo and to evacuate towards the beach. I got up, my parents were already up and had also received a recorded phone call with a similar message.

We realised that we needed to put the initial part of our bushfire plan into action, again we checked weather conditions as the fires near me app wasn't showing that the bush fire had moved at that point.

We dressed in appropriate clothing, my son was directed to stay in the house (he is hard of hearing and wears hearing aids, I was able to remain in contact with him via his fm transmitter "Roger"). My Dad put on our petrol run pump that feeds off two dams and we began hosing down the house.

At 7:30 am two men from the Department of Forestry came up to the property to let us know the fire was in the state forest and North of Dog Trap Road. They were very calm, nothing urgent about the way they spoke. They asked what we would do 'if' fire was to come to the property, I explained that I would evacuate with my son 'if' fire was to reach the property. I also told them I knew my Dad wouldn't leave, their response was, 'as long as he knows to seek shelter in the house if the fire arrives at the property and then once the front passes he can come out and put out spot fires'. My Mum asked about firefighters fighting the fire, they responded by stating it was a large forest fire and there wasn't enough fire trucks or access to fight the fire in the state forest so we probably won't have a fire engine on site to assist. After they left we relayed their message to my Dad and continued preparing the house.

At approximately 8am a Fire and Rescue fire engine (Batemans Bay truck 217) arrived at Mum and Dad's, I was on the back veranda assisting my Dad so did not engage in conversation with them on arrival. I realised this probably meant the fire was going to come closer to the property than the predicted forecast. I felt the firefighters would highly likely request I evacuate as I was there with a young child, so I then focused on getting additional protective gear ready for my parents, just in case. I also remember feeling a lot of relief that if they did make me evacuate they were there to support my parents and put out any fires if needed. I would find out later that day that this fire truck had arrived with little to no water and they would leave my parents before the emergency was over leaving them alone to defend the property.

At approximately 8:20am I was on the back deck while holding the ladder for my Dad when I spotted fire to the South of our property (Dunn's Creek Road end, opposite end to where Forestry has told us at 7:30am the fire was at) I called out to Mum and some firefighters who were assisting her put our goats into our garage to let them know.

Within two minutes I could then see fire breaking through the state reserve across the gully directly in front of me, the wind picked up with an unusual force and the heat started becoming uncomfortable on exposed skin.

At about that same time I heard my son screaming out for me, I went into him and was met by one of the firefighters who told me I needed evacuate. I agreed, but told him I couldn't leave without letting my parents know, I asked if I could have 2 minutes to let them know, he responded that I needed to be gone in a minute. As I got into my car I could see the fire rolling down the hill from the direction of Dog Trap Road, I took a photo as I drove off at exactly 8:27 am, this would be the last photo of our home standing.

I will leave my story here as the rest I did not experience first hand (my parents Sue and Mick Kelly have made their own submission).

I would like though to end by retelling the final moments of our home. By 9:30 am our home was on fire, it is believed materials within the ceiling spontaneously combusted with the intense heat

from the Southerly that hit blowing an ember storm back through the property. Once my parents realised there was fire with the roof cavity Dad smashed through the kitchen ceiling trying to put out the fire, the ceiling then collapsed on him and he was on fire, but thankfully Mum was there to hose him down. My Mum made two calls to Triple Zero but no help was available and our family home of 35 years burnt to the ground taking all possession with it and my parents lucky to escape with their lives.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

For us the lack of communication was a huge contributing factor. One text message was sent out at 6:02 am, the next was not sent until 9:27 am. When authorities realised how quickly the fire was spreading and how much worse it was becoming then originally expected why did they not send additional notifications? We needed to know the conditions had upgraded to catastrophic, that the fire was now undefendable and lives were at risk if you were within the fire's path. All these warnings were used by authorities on Saturday 4th January 2020, so why were they not used on New Years Eve to warn those of us in the fire's path? At 6:02 am people were still asleep, additional messages should have been sent out and they should have notified us that the situation had escalated exponentially! Our home was already burnt to the ground and the 'fires near me' app still did not show the fire near our property. You can not give people an app to rely on for information, life or death information and not ensure it provides correct, real time current information. We were told by the Department of Forestry at 7:30 am the fire was traveling in the direction of Dog Trapp Road (North of the property), they asked what our plans were 'if' fire were to impact the property. When the fire did arrive less than an hour later it hit us from Dunn's Creek Road on the South end of the property and within a couple of minutes was visible at the back of the property in a Westerly direction, it then finally hit the property from the North. Again this was important information we needed to know in order to make appropriate decisions, if we had known the property was going to be impacted on three fronts instead of just one different decisions would have been made and I would have packed up some of our irreplaceable items.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Living in the country and on a property we have always been very bush fire aware. My parents property was well cleared and they had removed every tree legally possible, we had a fire plan worked out with multiple evacuation points for different scenarios. My parents property has two dams, their petrol pump sat on a cleared gravel area within a corrugated iron hut, my Dad had dug all pipes under ground to prevent them melting in the event of a fire and any exposed fixtures are metal. On the morning of the fire when Dad started the pump he also ran an additional sprinkler over the pump house to protect the pump and keep it cool. Within the middle of the home we had a glassed in open air garden, there was a sprinkler system connected to the dam pump which also sprayed water on this section of the house. Their property had three water tanks as they aren't connected to the town water. These tanks are connected to an electric pump, if the power fails (as it did) the water can still be used via a gravity feed from the top tank. We all wore protective clothing and before I evacuated I had left out goggles, face mask, heavy duty leather gloves, additional protective clothing and woollen blankets for my parents. We had downloaded the 'fires near me' app and were checking weather conditions and other online sources of information regularly. The radiant heat melted the firefighting pump and we know from the materials that melted our home reached temperatures over 1000 degrees Celsius. We were well prepared for a bushfire, but this was a fire storm. Without the appropriate level support from firefighting resources

and correct up to date information this fire was truly undefendable.

1.3 Response to bushfires

I appreciate that the fire storm and subsequent damage that hit Batemans Bay on New Years Eve was unprecedented but even with the predictions the night before why were the fire authorities so underprepared? The one Fire and Rescue truck (Batemans Bay Truck 217) at our home was almost out of water on arrival! The truck also left before the emergency was over, apparently receiving a call they were needed to defend the ambulance station. When the firefighters left they dropped their firehoses, leaving them on the ground at Mum and Dad's - why would they do this? They advised my parents to continue putting out spot fires and told them they should be fine and even gave my Mum a hug as they left. This fire truck had only left my parents for a short time when the devastating Southerly hit. As I evacuated at 8:27 am fire was already running down the road to the houses below, I drove approximately 7 kms to evacuate to our friends home. In that time I passed only two other fire engines and one RFS four wheeled drive, nothing more. At approximately 9:15 am we saw the first water bombing helicopter arrive in Batemans Bay and my parents home was already burnt down before the VLAT arrived. Almost 500 homes were destroyed in the Eurobodalla Shire, why did it take so long for help to arrive?

1.4 Any other matters

When the Fire and Rescue truck (Batemans Bay Truck 217) left my parents property they filmed a video as they drove off taking in the fire on their property, through their front gate and a short distance down the road where it can be seen as the devastating Southerly begins to hit. They posted this video on their Facebook social media page, (Fire and Rescue NSW Station 217 Batemans Bay) it has been viewed over 20 thousand times and was also shared by media outlets. The video was shared without sound, apparently due to bad language. We still have many questions about this day and decisions made. My family and I would like to request that we can view this video with sound. Thank you.

Upload files

D5CE52E5-4D5C-4E57-B957-A1DF3F9CD415.png - [Download File](#)
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Tue, 31 Dec, 6:02 am

NSWRFS EMERGENCY
BUSH FIRE WARNING -
Mogo - Leave now to
the East towards the
beach and shelter in
place.
www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or
[1800679737](tel:1800679737)

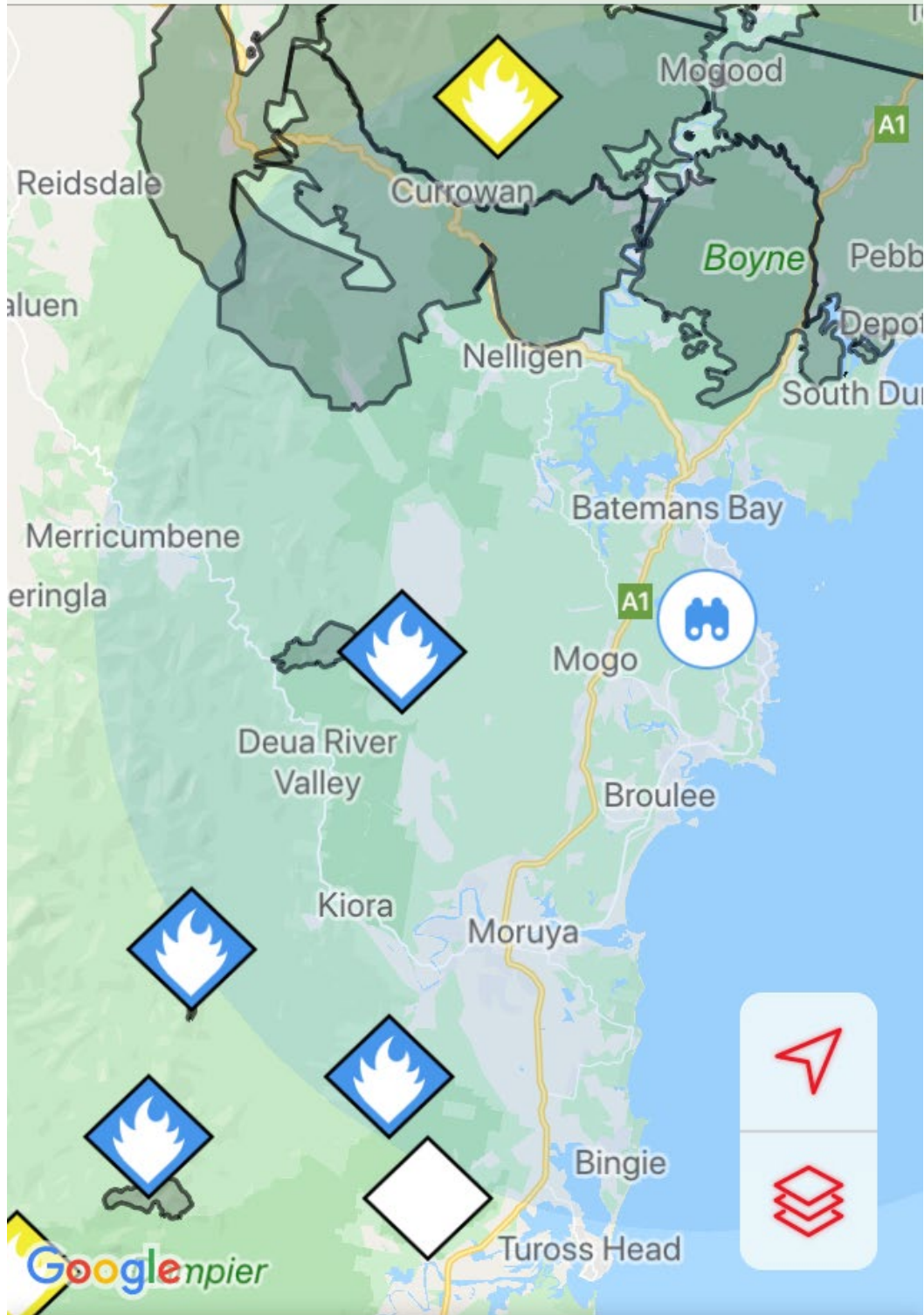
Tue, 31 Dec, 9:29 am

NSWRFS EMERGENCY
BUSH FIRE WARNING -
Batemans Bay, Malua
Bay, Surf Beach and
surrounds - Seek
shelter as the fire
arrives. Check
www.rfs.nsw.gov.au /
[1800679737](tel:1800679737)



Map

List



Last update 0 minutes ago

