



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Rhys

Last name

Kenna

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

Our story - Rhys Kenna, age 64, David Kenna age 28 Property Location - Yowrie west of Cobargo

From about 10 pm on the 30 December, we observed the Badja Forest Fire glow with increasing size and intensity as it approached our Yowrie property from the west. By about midnight the first signs of active flames appeared on the trees in the distance as it crossed the escarpment. This was about 20 kms away. From this time on a steady stream of vehicles was seen evacuating east along Yowrie Road, heading towards Cobargo.

We continued preparations on our property, with pumps and hoses being made ready for the onset of fire. Vehicles, farm equipment and gas bottles were relocated onto open areas away from the home. By about 1 or 1:30 am the fire was seen to cross the next line of hills to the west. The temperature was increasing

to 40-45 degrees with the appearance of more active flame. The roar of the fire was also increasing in volume. Power supply was cut around this time.

By about 2:30 am the fire crossed the last line of hills. The landscape to the west was alight with flames, the roar of the fire was deafening, and the ground was rumbling. Shortly after crossing the last ridge line, the neighbour's house (about a kilometre away) exploded as it was engulfed in flames. The fire was on a rapid course as it crossed Tanto Creek and began to impact our property.

Before the fire reached the house yard, we noticed active flame of several metres in height also coming from the south, which had crossed Yowrie Road. Both fire fronts impacted us simultaneously from the south and the west. Just before we were hit, the main firefighting pumps (2) were turned on. We had 7 x IBC containers (1000 litres of water in each) strategically located on the bank area, west and south sides of the house. One pump was spraying the house and shed through fixed nozzles. David used the high-pressure pump, with 25 mm hose to put out fire in the trees immediately to the west of the house. We used another IBC and high-pressure pump located on the trailer as a mobile unit. This was used to help fight fires on the south side of the house. I am not sure how long this continued for. In between moving vehicles from unburnt to burnt areas to save them, the fire engulfed our property. At some point, David was overrun while attempting to remove the draughting hose from an empty IBC to another unit. This is when we lost our high-pressure pump and hoses. We then had to rely on the trailer mounted pump and hose. We had another 5000 litres of water available from a tank attached to the house.

Soon after, a fire front approached from the east, brought back by a wind change. This impacted the east side of the house causing a large panel of glass in the lounge-room to crack. Luckily David was on hand and able to deal immediately with the fire in this location. We continued putting out spot fires until about midday. At some stage during the fire, our power pole caught alight and was unable to be put out. It came down, narrowly missing the shed and 20,000 litre water tank. Whilst we were relocating vehicles to burnt open ground, our neighbour's house to the south was seen to become engulfed in flames. These climbed well above the 20-metre-tall pine trees to the west of their house. An explosion of gas bottles followed.

By about 1 pm New Year's Day, we felt that the immediate fire situation was contained, and we were able to collapse exhausted on the ground. The house was saved due to the 18 months of preparation and planning. This included purchasing pumps, IBC containers, and hoses and preparing areas immediately around the house yard for some time in advance.

Communication immediately following the event, was intermittent, unreliable and almost certainly non-existent. My wife was evacuated to Narooma. Her concern became heightened as news of Cobargo filtered through to the evacuation centre. Eventually I was able to make contact.

Our sense of time passing was literally a blur as we dealt with the impact, from when the fire first hit until we were satisfied that immediate danger had passed. On Wednesday we visited our neighbours' houses (northern side) to check on the impact there. We were able to put out several spot-fires. We were amazed to see these two homes still intact with some fire damage, although sheds had been lost.

In the aftermath, at no time did any emergency service agencies

arrive to check on our survival or well-being. The first government agency to visit were the Land Service Rangers to check on injured animals and that was on Saturday. Power was not restored for seven weeks due to the number of burnt power poles in our area. On the night of the fire, our house was filled with thick smoke setting off smoke alarms. The smell remains. Water tanks required de-sludging and cleaning before fresh water could be brought in. One volunteer service provider came to assist with removal of dangerous trees close to the house. Unfortunately, they chose to return before the agreed day (when we would be home) and dropped the trees. They were left for me to clean up, creating more work and further distress.

In reflection, almost five months later, we are still focused on property clean-up, rebuilding fences and preparation for future fire events which are likely to become a feature of our landscape through drought and climate change. A sense of community, engagement with neighbours and shared experience has helped heal some of the trauma associated with this event. The practical assistance provided through Cobargo Relief Centre was appreciated. We were able to source clean bottled water. Recently we were pleased to farewell the remnants of our burnt firefighting equipment as part of the clean-up process.

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

Lack of action by government for 40 years despite advice and warnings from Scientists.

1.3 Response to bushfires

*Federal Government not utilising aerial resources that were offered earlier in the season
*Ignoring advice and not meeting with retired heads of Fire Organisations
*Poorly and inadequately resourced local RFS units
*Communication systems that didn't work
*Confusing mixed messages given to coastal holiday makers

Supporting documents or images
