



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Sally

Last name

Armstrong

Submission details

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

My Story

I am 75 years old and have no academic qualifications, however, I have spent a lot of time in the bush, am a keen gardener and weather watcher. Over the past 7 decades I have seen the devastation fires can bring.

My home has been threatened by bushfire 4 times in the last 20 years and I have always lived in rural/residential subdivisions, not in bushland. Once in Berridale and three times since living here at Kalaru. Three times my home was saved by a wind change and once by a team of Rural Fire Service Personnel. During the Tathra fire and the 2019/2020 bushfire crisis we were evacuated. I have been fortunate to escape the worst that these fires can bring, but I have many friends who were not so lucky and I have seen the terror, devastation and tragedy that bushfires bring to our communities.

No doubt many others will address the problems with communications during a severe bushfire event and the provision of firefighting resources throughout NSW, therefore there are three issues I would like the commission to carefully consider. I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

1.2 Preparation and planning

1. Land use planning and management, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction.

Bushfires have always been a part of Australian life. We have extreme weather events which we cannot change. We have natural bushland that thrives and survives on fire, and it creates its own fuel load on a regular basis to increase the chance of fire. Our population is growing constantly and our cities and towns are expanding further and further into these bushlands each time a new subdivision is developed. This can be seen on the south coast of NSW from the Victorian border up to Wollongong. An area I am familiar with.

Communities such as Eden, Pambula, Merimbula, Tathra, Bermagui, Narooma, Batemans Bay, and all the little villages in between, show a perfect example of communities being surrounded by our native forests and bushland, with arms spreading into and amongst the homes of these coastal villages. All this can be seen when viewing the satellite pictures on the Fires Near Me NSW app site. It was alarming to watch the bushfires tracking down these ridges of bushland and overwhelming these towns and villages during the 2019/2020 bushfire on the south coast.

It is important to have the capabilities to respond to general bushfire outbreaks, however, we will never have enough firefighting capabilities to protect everyone in a major fire event, such as the 2019/2020 fire. We can only warn people to get out early and hopefully keep our firefighters safe, not having to risk their lives to save others during a deadly situation.

The main point I would like to make in this submission is that I strongly believe one of the most important answers to managing our major bushfires is land management, appropriate clearing with buffer zones around communities, together with a fresh look at land zoning and building standards by local government in conjunction with Rural Fire Services.

I see natural bushland that has been burnt recently, as around Tathra only two years ago, which has now sprung to life (unlike the many homes burnt to the ground there) and presents just as great a danger when the next drought comes along, I think we need to have a good hard look at our land management around the south east coast of NSW, just as one example.

In Kalaru, where I live we now have three new subdivisions being developed, all closely surrounded by native bushland, no more than 50 metres from homes to be built and only a stones throw from the trail of devastation that the Tathra bushfire left in its wake – this is madness.

I know many people cannot comprehend the idea of native forest clearing, or management or modification of our native bushland for the welfare of our communities, not to mention the welfare of our native animals. But they can go hand in hand if carefully planned and thought out and I truly hope these ideas will not fall on deaf ears.

What's the point of grand National Parks running from the north to the south of NSW which are condemned to burn during drought every few years, decimating the wild life and destroying nearby communities. We know from experience, that the bush and native wildlife recover much quicker than the communities burnt out.

During droughts we are going to have severe bushfires and we

know that the winds most likely to fan those fires come from the west and the north west, out of central Australian deserts. It was clearly shown during this fire season, as the strip of National Parks in NSW caught fire, the front pushed steadily towards the east coast where the bulk of the population live and where many people in those communities fled to the beaches and the ocean for protection. We cannot let this happen again, on this scale, knowing what we know and hopefully having learnt from this recent event.

The images we saw on our TV were such a lesson. That policeman near his patrol car near Batemans Bay, racing towards his car, screaming to motorists to go, go, go whilst the eucalypts in the background were exploding into balls of fire, will be etched on many minds forever.

There are examples where modifying the landscape may have assisted in the protection of communities and assets, whether by accident or planning, and I sincerely hope this line of thought will be thoroughly explored in the future.

According to the Bawley Point Fire Captain, the property of Willinga Park, which had been partly cleared and grazed, made it possible to save Bawley Point from the bushfire coming from the west.

Mogo Zoo was saved partly because there was open cleared land on its critically threatened border, on the western side.

Canberra now has an Arboretum on its northwest border of several hundred hectares, which was partially planted out in a variety of less combustible species after the devastating fires of early 2000 to help protect Canberra.

Farmers have told stories where they have buffer zones for their properties and they prepare areas to safeguard their stock.

These buffer zones or more open spaces could be partly cleared and maintained as open parklands for community use as bike trails, sports ovals, golf courses or other things, by Local Councils in the future.

Once these fires are upon us there is no hesitation to bulldozer fire fronts and clear vegetation, so why not plan ahead and do this work on a regular basis. Clear and modify where necessary around communities and along main highways and other roads if necessary.

This can work, so do let us plan and act before the emergency arises again, which we know it will.

2. The education and perhaps regulation of planting of certain vegetation in residential and rural/residential properties and streetscapes, together with incentives for home owners to maintain and prepare their properties every winter for the oncoming summer bushfire season.

Encourage and educate people about their gardens. The danger of the "set and forget" garden, where shrubs and trees, often natives, are planted and forgotten. Gardens turn into bushland settings within residential areas, overgrown, often dead or dying, with a heavy understory of dry and dead bark and leaves. A recipe for disaster during the bushfire season.

When we bought our rural/residential block some properties had mature gum trees growing. Now most people have cleared these trees close to their houses, however, some have planted out their properties with dozens of gum trees, which are now very large and drop vast amounts of leaves and bark. This is a grave concern to neighbours, especially in dry times.

The planting of certain natives species should be discouraged for the general welfare of the community.

Let's encourage everyone to use winter and spring to clear and clean up our gardens, and to make them as fire proof as possible.

3. The ongoing inspection and removal of trees overhanging power lines.

Some year ago our street was inspected for trees and vegetation that could cause an issue with the power lines. Lopping and pruning was carried out. However, this needs to be done again, hopefully this winter, as many trees have large overhanging branches. I believe this was the cause of the Tathra fire two years ago. We recently had a severe wind storm which blew down several very large trees in our subdivision, any one of which could have taken out a powerline. Not such a threat of fire at the moment, but a different story if it had happened over Christmas. I trust in the future inspection and action will become a regular event.

Supporting documents or images
