



Your details

Dr

Title

First name

Samantha

Last name

Kneeshaw

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

My name is Samantha Kneeshaw, I am a teacher and mother of 2 girls, my husband is a physiotherapist and we built this house 11 years ago. I live in Conjola near Myrtle Gully bridge and stayed to defend our property on my own. On NYE I was very luck to have dropped off my children in town, including our dogs and returned to the property before the roads were blocked, unaware about what was to unfold. I was called by a friend Bruce [REDACTED] who warned me that the fire was approaching. I thus had time, around an hour, to prepare the house. I was also called by [REDACTED] a friend and police officer on the road block who sent two fire trucks to my neighbours property. The official warning didn't alert until the fire was upon us. The fire hit my property before running over the hill to Conjola and Fisherman's Paradise.

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

Two days before the fires on NYE, my husband, younger daughter and myself walked up and sat on a hill just behind our property. We were rather dismayed to see a regional fire unit lighting fires to the west of us, just behind some houses to the west of the princes hwy. We were assuming they were protecting the electricity lines. We could clearly see the fire truck and fire. It was a little alarming as the predicting conditions and incredibly dry conditions put this fire at a very close proximity to the houses to our west and our property on the other side of the Princes Hwy. This back burn was not extinguished. I don't think any of the back burns worked due to the extremely dry conditions. The fires, especially those up little forest road were left to burn. Why do we not have the resources to put them out, they were simply left - houses were lost unnecessarily up there. The drought is caused by human induced climate change and was the main contributing factor to the way the fire could pass over anything, even very short grass. No amount of back burning would have helped with these conditions in my opinion. The back burn, especially the one two days prior was of concern. Are people making decisions off there own back? Are there rogue units? Was this decision to back burn so close to houses in such conditions wise?

1.2 Preparation and planning

We felt we were well prepared weeks in advance. We are fully insured. We had prepared our property by cutting the long grass short. Clearing sticks. Clearing flammable material from around the house. Putting brackets on the roof to hold the sprinklers. Testing the sprinkler range. Testing the petrol fire fighting pump. Had two shipments of water to top up the tank. Testing dive tank and volume of air. Teaching the children to use the regulators on the dive tank. All essential paper work and photos etc were being stored in Milton. Leaving fire gear in hall for instant use.

1.3 Response to bushfires

We had a fire fighting hose with a 1/2 filled <100,000L water tank, 3 sprinklers on the roof being driven by 3 hoses attached to a 5 sprinkler head pump. A back up generator. I placed my diving tank with air regulator in the 8m swimming pool, under the water, prior to the fire hitting as a last resort. I had a full cotton work overalls, gloves, hat, torch, tough boots and mobile with me. The whole house was shut up and the doors were not opened. The fires hit in three directions within 30 minutes. The first front to hit from the west side of the highway was the one lit two days prior. The other fronts came from the original fire. The house was totally surrounded by fire.

1.4 Any other matters

The preparation, as well as the house being in a lower position, surrounded by Australian hardwood decking, pebble and grass and made of colour bond saved the house. We were very lucky, the double glazed windows on one section of the house cracked on the outside only. I was lucky that I had the tank in the pool as I had to go under for around 10 minutes to protect myself from the fire. All the surrounding property was damaged. The car outside the garage and the house vents melted. If I had not been here we would have lost the property, I am certain of that. The sprinkler system and fire pump worked well. I had to put out spot fires which would have also taken the property after the fire passed. I am glad that the wonderful fire volunteers were not with me as I didn't want to endanger anybody else due to my decision to stay and defend. I am happy I stayed and the extreme event didn't

effect me negatively. My sorrow is with the wildlife, how much was destroyed and has not returned. I kept a record of the birds on this land, nearly 90 species. Its now only 28. Only a single wombat has returned of the mammals, greater gliders, sugar gliders, bandicoots, bats etc have all been killed. I am trying to restore and recreate areas to hid for the wildlife - it is terribly sad walking through a once thriving ecosystem to this and the area is vast. The Kiola fire volunteers who were with my neighbours came down to check on me after the fires (they didn't know I was here alone) and volunteer Russel sat with me for a while. That was very comforting and I am always be grateful for their company after the fires.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- house fire NYE.jpg
 - pool fire NYE.jpg
 - house from chook pen fires NYE.jpg
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