Your details

	Mr
Title	
First name	Sean
Last name	Thompson

Submission details

I am making this submission as	Emergency services personnel
Submission type	I am submitting on behalf of my organisation
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	I am a trained bush fire fighter with more than 20 years experience in NSW bush fire operations. I was involved in fire operations throughout the whole 19/20 fire season, starting operations in August 2019 and ending in February 2020. Whilst combatting these fires, my own residence came under threat from the Bills Crossing Fire, burning right up to the back yard fence. I watched live stream of the fire whilst working in the local control centre, knowing that somewhere in all that smoke and flame was my house. I had to trust in the preparations I had done before leaving, and the actions of fire fighting personnel on the day. Meanwhile, I had a job to do and had to get on with it. I received confirmation two days later that my house was OK. I was one of the lucky ones.

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	The unprecedented dry conditions throughout the east coast was undeniably the most significant factor that contributed to the fire season we had. Coupled with dry lightning storms, that presented a difficult starting point for responding agencies. Private property burns that are not contained and escape contributed to a number of wildfires. Little is done to investigate or prosecute these occurrences but the primary fire management agency. Yet escaped property burns have cost significantly in terms or resources, money, environment, and mental health. Further, the contributing actions of arsonists did not help the already stretched resources of responding agencies.
1.2 Preparation and planning	Land management agencies with responsibilities for managing overall fuel hazard loads conducted hazard reductions where practical. However in some cases where there was no hard containment it was not possible to implement a number of proposed burns leading into the season due to the overall fuel and soil moisture dryness. From personal experience I witnessed areas that had been recently hazard reduced being burnt over without impediment. Focussing hazard reduction around a nominal per annum hectare quota, as opposed to protecting strategic asset zones (such as urban interfaces) has not helped the State's fire management objectives one iota.
1.3 Response to bushfires	Responding agencies were hard pressed to maintain a sustained response throughout the fire period, in part due to fatigue issues, as well as resources stretched across multiple incidents. As often the case, small remote fires had to be left when property and lives were threatened elsewhere (most often in more urban interfaces). Incident managers were faced with making such resource allocation decisions, knowing full well that they were robbing Peter to pay Paul so to speak - but there was no other choice. Often too, fire behaviour was unpredictable and did not follow traditional patterns further making the tasks of fire fighters and fire planners difficult to the extreme.
1.4 Any other matters	Funding models for agencies like the RFS seemed skewed toward built infrastructure, and vehicle plant and equipment rather than fire response for non declaration incidents. Small fires that otherwise could be nipped at the bud have been left because either the fire is in difficult terrain and crews can't drive to the spot, or funding is not available for hiring heavy plant to construct containment lines. Money is spent instead on building or enhancing fire control centres that end up sitting empty and unused. Other combat agencies, like the NPWS are not allocated a sufficient fire management budget to maintain existing fire competencies let alone enhance current skills or build on those.

Supporting documents or images