

Orara Valley Response to the November – February Bushfires

Submission to NSW Government Bushfire Inquiry made to email address provided inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au

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I am making this submission as a resident affected in a Bushfire area.

Also I managed the local community Facebook group and contributed to the community consultations with Coffs Harbour City Council regarding the Federal Government recovery funding.

I am willing for my submission to be made public.

Major communications infrastructure investment

- Technology completely inadequate for unprecedented fires – not a business issue but a government agency responsibility for population protection
- Mobile phone and internet connectivity impacted by fires – back up systems
- Fires near me app useful but needs development
- Funding for residents to upgrade/access additional IT/comms resources

Recognition of the Bushfire risks – research

Early identification and action on spot fires/risks before they become major disasters

- Federal /State agency role – population protection responsibility
- Environment priority reconsidered & incorporated

Real education for Bushfire preparedness – too little too late – needs residents to invest

- Complacency is/was a major issue
- \$ investment by local & State governments in education

Recruitment for RFS & auxiliary on the ground support

- Communications & Social Media – auxiliary role
- Aligning & directing community emergency phone tree action – local knowledge
- Updating Fires Near me app so it is live
- Property preparedness support & direction – fund RFS to provide

Evacuation Planning & Education – local government & RFS supported & directed – clear strategy/planning

- Evacuation locations planning according to type of disaster & access

LGA communications prior to fire season – engagement with communities & planning for evacuations; Office of Emergency Management clearly involved in the physical planning and organisation with other emergency services: but no awareness of the communities – no presence, No communications. No help in coordinating services or getting residents out!

- Formal education on strategy for staff & residents – roles & responsibilities (Policy & procedures facilitated by State government)
- All community meetings for fire preparation supported by LGA staff
- Coordination of local Landcare and Bush Regeneration groups to support residents for preparation action
- Indigenous burning methods workshops & practice funded

Communications during a fire event or series of events were extremely poor

- Evacuation arrangements were poorly communicated or not at all
- No communication at evacuation centres regarding what was happening on the fireground

- News updates – online, phone or text/message – so people know, not rumours
- Animal evacuations & ongoing care

Water infrastructure investment for land owners & government agencies – tanks (underground) pumps and pipes – don't leave this to residents in the front line – they can be holding the fire front from populations centres

Community meetings with experts to educate on residents' roles & responsibilities as well as LGA, RFS, Land care & Bush regeneration

- Native animals and plants – wires & residents' how to help guides
- Propagation of plants now
- Community projects

Donations coordination – government or statutory authority to direct to individuals affected by the fires

- Millions donated globally supposedly to individuals – completed by passed by ill-informed but well meaning people
- Still have people living in tents, inadequate sanitation and water, Winter coming and no heating