



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Stephen

Last name

Douglas

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

I am a retired FRNSW Officer with over 33 years service and more than 8 years with RFSNSW. My house at [REDACTED] Dargan was burnt down on 21st December 2019. I was present when the fire arrived. I had spent 15 hours backburning to the north of Dargan and Clarence. Something we had been doing for more than a week. I had a few hours sleep and awoke to find the fire coming out of Lithgow to the west. Despite the conditions I thought that I could perhaps save my house. I had a generator, a pump and three hoses. When the fire finally arrived all my experience and training said it was time to leave and that any attempt at fighting the fire had a high probability of my serious injury or death. I rode away from my house on my motorcycle and when I returned two hours later my house had burnt to the ground.

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

Climate change seems to have been a contributing factor. We had experienced a very dry period. Unusually dry. Six years before a fire came through the same way in mid October. It was very dry and windy but the temperature was only 16 degrees and the humidity about 30%. In Clarence, Dargan and Bell we saved all the houses. At the time I said we were lucky because if it had happened in December with higher temperatures and lower humidity we would not have done as well. Unfortunately I was right.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Preparation for something like this is problematic. Hazard reduction requires a very specific set of conditions to be done safely and effectively. Many burns were planned but very few were carried out in the years leading up to this because conditions would not allow. In one case a burn in the lower mountains was cancelled because some people were running over the Harbour Bridge.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Response was hampered by the number and size of fires burning at the time. Historically we have had help from Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and even Tasmania. Because of fires in those states assistance was not forthcoming. For the same reason the number of aerial firefighting resources available in the Blue Mountains was greatly reduced from what we had had at other fires in the past. When the fire took my house I saw only one helicopter working in the area and I'm not sure it was even trying to fight the fire. In any case one helicopter is worse than useless in conditions like this. Without a concentration of copters and several fixed wing aircraft working in relays you wouldn't even slow it down.

1.4 Any other matters

At times like this we need all the help we can get but the issue remains that a lot of the units committed to this fire, while well trained had little or no bushfire fighting experience at all. Even very experienced bushfire fighters can be overwhelmed and scared in conditions like those encountered. For units used to grass plains or urban fires this was something else. I don't know how to address this but it is a factor. Every inquiry that I know of in the last 40 years has highlighted the need for better communication between different fire services, local and interstate. Some kind of standard system needs to be implemented across the country. Thank you for the chance to have my say. Good Luck !

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- image 1.JPG
 - image 2.jpg
 - image 3.jpg
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