

[REDACTED]

10 March 2020.

The NSW Bushfire Inquiry,

Dear Sir or Madam,

According to a local history book up till about fifty years ago the Nymboida Fire Brigade would tell landholders if there appeared to be an excessive buildup of inflammable material in the bush on their properties and that hazard reduction burning was needed in the cooler months. Also some councils used to issue an order to property owners if their land became "overgrown".

A few years ago I sought to reduce the fire hazards along parts of [REDACTED] Road between 1500 and 3700. I envisaged burning off a limited section late each afternoon ^{with} yellow and black burning off signs erected. I could see that the Council potentially burning between about 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. is the wrong time of the day. I have a farm weedspraying vehicle which has a 450 litre tank, a hose of over 100 metres and a powerful 5.5 horse power pump. These were areas adjoining our family properties. I envisaged doing it for free.

The Ulmarra Fire Control said I would have to get permission from the Clarence Valley Council. Although I spent hours at the Council headquarters and put in written requests there was no meaningful response. I was referred to the Officer whose responsibility is dealing with complaints about smoke from backyard incinerators.

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Although I applied at the very beginning of the safe period and sought updates on my request, I was told by phone and not in writing at the very end of the safe period months later just as the fire restrictions were coming in that the answer was no, that I would have to have a huge insurance policy in addition to my farm liability policy even to be considered and that I could face huge fines.

There have been two catastrophic fires in the area since. During the worst days of the fire on 8 and 9 November 2019 the farmers were left to fend for themselves. No fire trucks or aeroplanes were seen. Either the authorities were stretched too thinly or they considered the area too unsafe.

On 8 November 2019 I gave up trying to save the house at 3700 [REDACTED] Road and went back to try to save the bigger house at 3937 [REDACTED] Road. On the way along the public road, giant tongues of flame were swept horizontally by the fire storm right across the road behind me and then right across the road in front of me. There was a momentary change in the wind direction. My survival instinct kicked in and I accelerated through the flames. When I reached the other side of the fire I stopped my vehicle and got out to see if my vehicle was on fire.

Fortunately it wasn't. I proceeded and was able to ensure the survival of the house at 3937 with my

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weed spraying four wheel drive acting as a fire truck

I won't leave you my phone number as the
phone is still out of order four months later.

Yours sincerely,

Harley Smith.