

## Your details

Mrs

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**Title**

**First name**

Heather

**Last name**

Dunnett

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## Submission details

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**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

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**Your story**

I live in the small coastal village of Berrara. I went through the 2001-02 fires where we were impacted on the 17th January 2002 and thought it would never happen again. All the bush belonging to NPWS surrounding this village was burnt out and we were saved because we were the last village impacted and there were some 60 fire trucks to save us. Not this time.

Our Progress assn and local people have been asking for a hazard reduction to be carried out around our villages. Nothing happened no matter how many times we asked. Two HRs were carried out in the bush between here and the main road but nothing around our village. With no HR's carried out the fire came through again on the 4th January with a vengeance and because of favourable winds our two fire trucks plus some strike teams PLUS the input from our local people banding together they saved our village. I want the RFS to have full say on when a HR needs to be carried out around ANY village within a one

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kilometer range and have the power to carry out a hazard reduction no matter if it is NPWS or privately owned land so this never happens again.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

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### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Lack of Hazard Reduction since last fires in 2002 on land under NPWS surrounding our villages.  
Lack of staff in NPWS to plan and carry out necessary HRs - in conjunction with local rural fire brigades, who want to carry out HRs  
Lack of local input to planned HRs with RFS  
Paperwork involved for local Brigades to plan and carry out HRs is ridiculous.  
More power to be given back to local Brigades as it was in the past

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

None was obvious by the NPWS who is in control of the National Park surrounding our villages.  
Not enough support given to local people and Brigades who requested HRs from NPWS over a period of fifteen years. - We started to ask for HRs four years after the 2002 fire. We were told by NPWS it would be 7 years then that went to 14 years then "as needed" Just put off and totally neglected villages safety.

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### 1.3 Response to bushfires

When the fires hit our local brigade had only its two trucks and the fleeting visits of three strike teams. Air support had been given the day before and one helicopter during the fire.  
Well organised locals who had their fire plans sorted months prior and sprinklers, hoses set behind holiday and locals homes saved the day with their own water supplies on the back of utes and drums. Everyone turned out to help.

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### 1.4 Any other matters

The RFS must have the right to say when a HR is needed in any bushland that surrounds any village anywhere in Australia, not just in NSW  
Need to have the right in a one kilometer range around our coastal villages and any other village anywhere.  
NPWS always say "but we did 2 HRs in the park near the village of Berrara, one a 40odd hectare (because it got away on them) plus one other see letters attached. None of these were anywhere directly near our villages but between Berrara and the highway.  
I was secretary for our local Progress association for over 13 years, so I know the fights we have had with NPWS over that time.

## Supporting documents or images

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### Attach files

- Shelley Hancock MP 21.1.20.docx
  - H Dunnett 110520 Ministers response to Rep SH.pdf
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## HEATHER DUNNETT

21<sup>st</sup> January, 2020

Shelley Hancock MP  
State Member for South Coast  
P O Box 1436,  
**NOWRA 2541**

Dear Shelley,

### **Re Need for RFS control over areas surrounding villages.**

In August 2018 I wrote to you about the pressing need to have hazard reductions carried out in and around Cudmirrah and especially Berrara. The land in question is under NPWS control and with our recent fires of Saturday the 5<sup>th</sup> January in and around Berrara and Cudmirrah, the fire came right up behind homes in Lakeway and Sundowner Ave in Berrara. Homes were in danger with trees alight behind homes, spot fires, but thanks to well organized locals and our own Brigade, some Strike Teams arriving at the right time, no homes were lost.

This is no thanks to NPWS who have not carried out any Hazard reductions since the 2001-2002 fires when it hit Berrara on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2002. Eighteen years of inaction.

I would ask that you would lobby that: APZ's be increased in width for a minimum 200metres possibly more, to keep homes and people safe. Even with the power line easement behind homes on Fishermans Rock Road Berrara and the APZ fire was still too close to manage.

I would also ask that you lobby that: Any bushlands within a kilometer range surrounding any villages anywhere, have Hazard Reductions taken out of the hands of owners/managers and subject to Rural Fire Service and the local Fire Brigades to manage as far as Hazard Reduction goes. NPWS or any other agency or persons to be advised when a HR is to be carried out but have no rights to stop same.

The land surrounding our villages have gone for just on 18 years of total neglect from NPWS and they must be held responsible for what has happened in our area as to the ferocity of the fire due to lack of Hazard Reduction. We are just so lucky everyone was so well prepared and all pitched in to save our area, not to mention our magnificent Fire Brigade crews who have been night and day working on fires around the Shoalhaven since November 2019.

Kind Regards



**Heather Dunnett**



**The Honourable Matt Kean MP**  
Minister for Energy and Environment

MD20/1090  
SH/ma 290120

The Hon Shelley Hancock MP  
Minister for Local Government  
Member for South Coast  
PO Box 1436  
NOWRA NSW 2541

By email: southcoast@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Minister

*Shelley*

Thank you for your letter on behalf of Ms Heather Dunnett about Asset Protection Zones. I appreciate you bringing Ms Dunnett's concerns to my attention.

The bushfire season was unprecedented and tragic for the many affected communities. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) played a critical role in responding to the bushfires and is one of four frontline firefighting agencies recognised under the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

I am advised that the NPWS has completed two hazard reduction burns in Conjola National Park adjacent to Berrara and Cudmirrah since 2001-02. A burn was completed in 2013-14 (42.18 hectares) and in 2015-16 (488.12 hectares). The hazard reduction burns were completed in partnership with the RFS.

NPWS also maintains the Asset Protection Zone on the national park boundary, located next to the township of Berrara. NPWS undertakes mechanical removal of woody debris and grass on an annual basis or as required to reduce fuel hazards next to the adjacent residential property.

As you would be aware, the NSW Government recently commissioned an independent inquiry into the 2019-20 bushfire season that will review the causes of, preparation for and response to the 2019-20 bushfires.

Ms Dunnett can find more information about the bushfire inquiry, including how to make a submission, on the NSW Government website: [www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/make-a-submission-to-the-bushfire-inquiry/](http://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/make-a-submission-to-the-bushfire-inquiry/).

If Ms Dunnett has any further questions about this issue, she can contact Michael Phelan, Manager, Shoalhaven Area, NPWS, on 4454 9500 or at [michael.phelan@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:michael.phelan@environment.nsw.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**Matt Kean MP**

Minister for Energy and Environment

*7.5.20*