



Your details

Ms

Title

First name

Heather

Last name

McGregor

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

We were at our second home at [REDACTED] North Rosedale NSW when the firestorm devastated our area, in particular our street. We had developed a fire plan, and prepared our block, from early December 2019. We took advice from CSIRO documents and the RFS.

On the night of 30 December, there was no indication of imminent danger, and we anticipated a calming of conditions overnight. At 6am on 31 December however, we received a text alert from the RFS which read 'NSW RFS EMERGENCY BUSH FIRE WARNING - Mogo - Leave now to East towards the beach and shelter in place'. Given this message, we enacted our fire plan, knowing our safe escape route was to the beach. Some people drove out, towards the fire, which given the circumstances we thought contrary to the RFS 6am advice.

When the heat became unbearable at around 10.30 am on 31.12.19, we retreated to the Boatshed Beach where we had by 7am stored three days worth of supplies. The heat and wind were intense and unbearable so we moved to the South Rosedale Beach. This beach is open and expansive and provided a safe zone which is at least 100 metres from fire fuel. At no time did we feel our lives were at risk.

We took photos at 11.18am and 11.35am from Boatshed Beach of the cliff below our house just after the southerly arrived (attached).

At approximately 12 noon we were able to climb back up the cliff above the South Rosedale lagoon, as this area at that stage was free of fire. Our house was the last house standing from the north on our side of the street. We used our prepared equipment to extinguish fires all around our house and threatening the house to the south. Five houses 69, 67, 65, 63, 61 were saved as a result of our interventions and those of our neighbour at 63, who also prepared, went to the beach, and returned after the firestorm passed over us. The southerly provided a reprieve which allowed us to return to our house and save it, however had we not been on the beach and able to return quickly, these five houses probably would have been lost as a result of the southerly, which forced fire back onto houses in the street, causing the destruction of 59, 57, 55 which ignited around 2.24pm and 62 and 60, which ignited at 1.34pm.

Our plan was always that we would retreat to the beach, and never put our lives at risk. This was based on careful consideration of all the advice we accessed. We differ from other opinions submitted to your inquiry that this step could have proved fatal. We kept low on the beach, positioned ourselves close to the ocean and distant from the dunes, and at no time during the onslaught of the north/westerly firestorm, did we feel at risk. Very hot, disturbed and uncomfortable yes, but not at risk. We estimate that less than 50 people were on the beach, and many were standing taking photos. We concluded that the safe zone on the South Rosedale beach was as safe as the designated safety zone at Malua Bay.

We had no assistance in our street from the RFS and when the water bomber arrived, around 2.40pm, I felt totally dismayed that the boatsheds were the first buildings to be targetted. We then watched the burning houses at 59, 57, 55 being water bombed but it was all too late, although houses either side were probably saved as a result. Two fire trucks came into our street around the same time but didn't use a hose, as the people didn't know where the hydrants were.

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

A contributing factor to our house and others being saved was the block clearing of leaf and tree litter and shrubs we did during December, right up to 27 December when we were still removing bark, fallen leaves and debris from the trees and removing shrubs adjacent to our house and taking this to green waste.

A contributing factor to the ferocity of the fire near us was the

amount of fuel on public land to the north west and between the beach and our street.

1.2 Preparation and planning

We developed our fire plan using expert advice. We stuck to our plan. We were prepared with protective clothing, goggles, gloves and masks, and equipped with hoses attached to the water supply, along with a water pump attached to our water tank. We placed this equipment inside our house when we retreated, but also had spare hose fittings.

1.3 Response to bushfires

We knew from the RFS advice that we had to be prepared well ahead of any threat and we were, which is why we felt some confidence in staying to defend. The experience was horrifying, but we survived it because we had a clear plan and stuck to it. We would do the same again, as a result of our experience.

1.4 Any other matters

I am attaching three photos, two taken from Boatshed Beach looking up at our house and the third, of our north boundary fence line, to show the difference between a block which was cleared of litter and one that was not.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- H - 1 - 11.35.jpg
 - H - 2 - 11.35.jpg
 - IMG_2321.JPG
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