



Title	Mrs
First name	Helen
Last name	Dwyer
I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>It was NYE 2019. The weather was awful. Hot morning with a strong westerly blowing. My husband Garry went into Ulladulla for a doctors appointment around 9:30. I had all curtains drawn, doors closed and ceiling fans going. Our neighbours in 15, a small 2 bed fibro holiday cottage with colorbond garage, had just been out fishing. Around 10ish I looked out of the curtains to see neighbours gathering in the street. I went down to see what was going on. The sky to the north west was black. As I spoke to neighbours a helicopter came across and dropped water in the gully to the north west. I didnt know what to do so went back to my 2 storey home and started hosing. I lost all sense of time from this moment on. A neighbours friend, Ken, came over to tell me to leave. I called out to neighbours in 15 to do the same. Neighbour in 13 told me to go to her friends place at Lake Conjola near the council caravan park. Ken helped me to quickly pack a few things into the car, put my 2 dogs in and head for Lake Conjola. I could see flames to the north as I headed out of my street. I phoned my</p>

husband to tell him where I was going. He was in a line of traffic stopped outside Milton and unable to return. I arrived at the property near the caravan park along with neighbours from 13 and 15. Neighbour from 15 also brought his boat. It was very stressful hours here as we had to go down to the lake as this property was under threat. Meanwhile my husband, Garry, made the decision to park the car at Narrawallee, swim the inlet and walk the beach to get back! He met me at the lake by which time my anxiety levels were peaking with controlling my 2 big dogs amongst the crowds gathered. Helicopters were filling buckets, the flames of the fires to the north and west could be seen. Some hours passed when we got the word that we could move back to the property we evacuated to. As we were walking through the caravan park I had a phone call from another neighbour telling us a number of houses had gone in our street. She gave me the number of another neighbour in the area who I phoned. He went up to our street and phoned me back to say our house had gone. I told my husband, rang my son and my brother then lost all communication. Garry and neighbour from 15 went in the car to get back to house but a tree on the road prevented them. So they launched the boat and came up the lake. They were faced by the utter devastation all around. The little cottage and shed on 15 were all intact. Our home was still on fire but utterly devastated. Neighbours in 15, Garry and I all returned to 15 [REDACTED]. I think it was around 4:30 pm. The next 2 days were harrowing. Houses were still going up. The air was thick with an acrid smell. There was no water or power. We had lost all communication. We had food and drinks. We stayed at 15 unable to go north to our sons home at Callala Bay. We had nowhere to go south. Besides that if you did try to go south you weren't allowed back. In his distress Garry became fixated on getting our car back from Narrawallee but couldn't. New Years Day saw the media come in droves. But how? The highway was closed north. We couldn't leave. This utter devastation was all around us and our house was still burning. Again I say those 2 days were harrowing. We had lost everything and had to sit and watch it. We had no one other than media in our street new years day. Our family were besides themselves as they didn't know where we were. A media person on the 2nd Jan gave me use of a satellite phone so I could phone our son. We felt forgotten. No one came to check if anyone was here. RFS cars went by. No one really initiated any contact. If we saw a car we would approach it. The mayor of the Shoalhaven came on the afternoon of the 2nd day and asked what she could do for us. Get us out of here, please, we've had enough!!!! The highway north was open the next morning. We left early in case it would shut again. There are lots of things that could be mentioned in here..... I could go on forever. A few questions I would like to raise:

- *There were no warnings specific to Conjola Park. Why? I know the fire came quickly but surely someone knew about it
- *Where was the support following the fire? For 2 days we waited at 15 with an influx of media but no one checking on us.

Both big questions.

Our neighbours have been our support. The Conjola Recovery Team have been wonderful in every area of support for us both.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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