



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Ian

Last name

Anderson

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A primary producer

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 retiree / farmer with our small beef cattle operation approximately halfway between Goulburn and Crookwell at Woodhouselee.
We are at 860 meters above sea level.

The recent summer bushfires had a profound impact on our lives and lifestyle, although we were not directly affected by fire.

I am a 71 year old, with a lung condition.
These are the issues we faced:

1. Anxiety

We live at the end of a 3 kilometre lane, which basically runs east to west. Winds in our area are predominantly westerly. Fire, if it comes will be from the west.

We have a bush fire plan and our basic plan is, after caring for the animals, to leave.

We spent months watching the Bushfires Near Me app every hour to see if we were in the road of a fire. It was not possible to see a bushfire in the distance as the smoke was so thick, visibility at times was down to less than 100 meters.

We had the smell of smoke, bushfires, 24x7 for months. Our house was closed up to keep the smoke out, but I still had to go out and check on our cattle and feed them.

My wife, also in her 70's, our daughter, son-in-law and their 4-month-old baby also live on our property. None of us have the ability to evacuate quickly, time is needed to prepare and plan our exit.

Good communications is essential for our health and safety.

2. Communications failures

We are in a mobile telephone service shadow area with a weak signal. When mobile services are in high demand we get no / very poor service. We could rarely get a mobile call in or out via our Telstra service provider.

We use Wi-Fi calling as a telephone backup capability, which connects our calls via our NBN satellite service.

The satellite service also needs line of sight from the dish to the satellite. With the volume of smoke around we had no satellite service.

We were virtually disconnected from the world around us, which was in a state of full emergency.

We watched ABC TV when it was possible to find out about the fire situation, but the ABC transmission to our area was also prone to failure.

At times we had no communication services at all.

3. Health issues

As I mentioned earlier, I am a 71 year old with a lung condition.

There were days when it was impossible for me to go outside to feed our cattle etc. My wife, also in her 70's had to undertake this work.

At times air quality was just plain dangerous. According to the aqicn.org web site, air quality in our area was Hazardous at 1726 PPM.

My normal resting heart rate is 59 bpm, during this time it stayed at 82 bpm with no exercise undertaken. I went to my GP who had me do an ECG and advised that I had nothing wrong, it was just my lungs / body struggling to breath with all the smoke.

In the end we had to take time out and drive to family in Sydney for several days at a time to get some relief.

This was my personal experience; recall that we had a 4-month-old baby staying with us during this period, with no understanding of the future health impacts on his life.

4. Ownership

With fires all around us, although we were not on fire, and poor to no communication, there was little to suggest our State and Federal governments were working together to help manage the issues around the fires.

Ownership of the fire management seemed to be passed around like a hot potato. Allegations of budget cuts, failure to back burn and that we had left our indigenous people out of the fire management process seemed more about political gamesmanship than about dealing with the fires and their aftermath.

It is clear that our State and Federal governments can work together as demonstrated by the effectiveness of the 'National Cabinet', to address the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

In contrast, the management of the summer of 2019 fires is a disgrace.

The exceptions being the heroes in our RFS services who gave their all to help their communities.

There is a very real need for a formal structure of managing

disasters of this nature going forward and this needs to be established before the summer of 2020 fires begin.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images
