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I am making this submission as	Business owner
Submission type	Organisation
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	Irrigear Goulburn
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Director
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>We supply firefighting equipment. Petrol and diesel pumps (firefighters), hoses, nozzles, sprinklers, fittings and the like. We also sell other irrigation and reticulation equipment.</p> <p>Every summer we see an increase in enquiry for this type of product, particularly if there is a local fire. We anticipate this upturn and can generally cater for it. This year was different. We, and every other business like ours from Byron Bay to Eden ran out of pumps and equipment. It wasn't just us. Every pump wholesaler (Onga, Davey etc...) ran out of fire pumps. Every hose wholesaler ran out of suction hose and firefighting hose. Every fittings supplier ran out of fire couplings and nozzles. For more than a month we received hundreds of phone calls every day from customers desperate to equip themselves to protect their properties and lives. And we could not deliver. It wasn't our fault or the wholesalers fault. It was just unprecedented demand. Even with very limited supply, we sold more firefighters in one day than we would normally sell in a</p>

year. In December we sold more firefighters than we had sold in the previous 10 years. We could have sold 5 times as many as we did. Multiply that statewide - the shortage was inevitable. Then there were the customers. Some were organised and well informed, updating or adding to their existing systems. Most were like rabbits in the headlights. Caught in the glare of the bright lights rushing at them that were the fires. They were unprepared, uninformed, scared, unskilled, unequipped. Some were also school teachers and engineers, with all the theory but no idea about the real world. Totally naïve about what they would need, what they could do, how it might work, what they could get. This was not the right time to start learning. We constantly advised them that a fire pump and a couple of hoses would not combat the fury of a fire in a bad day, they would be better off getting out. That electric pumps were not the best option. That a smaller hose will not give more pressure. And so on.

The problems here are twofold:

1. Reactive, not proactive. These people all waited until the last minute to get organised. There was no planning, and no equipment. Last minute. Retailers and wholesalers could not cope with the demand.
2. These people were trying to put together a fire plan at the last minute. There is plenty of advertising about knowing your fire plan, but there is no incentive to plan ahead. Our supply problems started long before the local fires (Currowan and Green Wattle) began. The supply problems began when the North Coast was on fire. They were assuming that they could put it all together in an hour or so, if they really had to. How can we encourage them to get the equipment before they need it? So, what is the solution? I have some ideas:

1. Subsidise or rebate people who are appropriately fire ready. Have the RFS check that a minimum standard of equipment and skill is attained and rebate the equipment purchase or subsidise it at the point of purchase. This will encourage people to invest in their own welfare early.

2. Educate. Again, as part of the incentive to own good and effective equipment, subsidise fire equipment purchases to people who have attended a course, conducted by the RFS. This will help them appreciate the problem and the solution.

Both of these measures will aid the RFS and emergency services by equipping and training the general public properly. Property protection will be enhanced and the community will be strengthened.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

Equipping the general public early, encouraging familiarity with their equipment and knowledge of its limitations.

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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