

Title	Ms
First name	Penelope
Last name	Barker
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	My partner and I have lived in Wingham for the past five years. I am a self-employed journalist and copywriter and my partner is a retiree. Our town was surrounded by three emergency level fires in November. We took turns sleeping for a week or more so someone was always watching for embers and keeping track of ABC bushfire updates. I lost at least two weeks income due to lack of sleep and anxiety and the time required to keep our home cleared of leaves and debris. We are still struggling to catch up financially but the rains have brought a big sense of relief.
1.1 Causes and contributing factors	Undoubtedly an extended period of drought was a contributing factor towards the severity, extent and prolonging of the fires which burned for more than two months. Climate change should also be considered as a contributing factor.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Had large water bombers been available I'm sure the extent of the fires could have been diminished. This area features hectares of inaccessible bushland.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Evacuation centres were set up quickly and efficiently but the response generally has been confused, slow and ineffectual. The community volunteer response has been amazing but people who lost their homes are still living in tents, farm sheds and caravans and have received little financial assistance from government or large charities. Some people are still reliant on donated non-perishable food supplies and have no fresh food. Communications are still down in some locations. The community has been forced to create its own Mid Coast Renewal Committee to try and coordinate relief efforts and support and provide continually updated information to people who have lost homes or incomes. Many older people have lost their homes and are still having to continue paying their mortgage. Many other people in outlying rural communities had no home or contents insurance. With over 180 homes lost and more severely damaged in the Mid Coast LGA the situation for many is dire. Winters here can be extremely cold so the situation will get even more serious in the coming months. Decent emergency housing is desperately needed.

1.4 Any other matters

The state and federal governments need to create a stockpile of emergency disaster relief housing. Folding prefab transportable homes like these -- www.vanhomes.com.au -- were developed following the 2004 tsunami and could be ordered cheaply in bulk from a Chinese manufacturer. Even large army tents would be better than nothing. In rural areas, farmers need to be able to stay on their land to care for livestock.

Also, in the case of a natural disaster of this scale the ADF needs to be deployed immediately. According to the ADF and Air Force websites the Office of Emergency Management can deploy them in civil emergencies to assist with logistics, catering, accommodation and many other vital services. They were supposed to be deployed to the Mid Coast on January 6. It is now March 4 and there is no sign of them.

Additionally, small local community halls provided a lifeline during the emergency as places to feed RFS volunteers, for people to pick up donated supplies and as central communication hubs. More of these are needed, and each needs a kitchen, bathroom with shower facilities and washing machine and office with computer and printer plus a generator in the event of a power outage.

Monetary donations also need to flow to people in need more quickly and effectively. This needs to operate at a local level, perhaps via a Mayoral Fund.

Upload files