

## Your details

Mr

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**Title**

**First name**

Peter

**Last name**

Stirling Benson

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## Submission details

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**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

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**Your story**

Caoura Station is located two kilometres north of the Shoalhaven Gorge and 11 kilometres east of Tallong. By Christmas 2019 the northern reaches of the Currowan bushfire had become the Morton Bushfire. From January 1 through February 7 (when the rains finally came) we were dealing with the constant threat of bushfires, experiencing dense smoke and glow of bushfires 24/7 - to the south, east and north of us. The long term effects of our inhaling toxic smoke for six weeks are not known

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

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### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

Drought - trees and vegetation exceptionally dry and water remains scarce  
Climate Change - summers are hotter and longer  
Bushfire Season - nowadays half the year  
Fuel Loads - typically 3 - 6 inches deep in large areas of the bush  
Arson - some fires are deliberately lit

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### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

Forewarned - experts had warned the authorities that this bushfire season would be catastrophic. Their warnings were ignored. Why?  
Catastrophic - as a result the community and wildlife have experienced untold suffering and tragedy. This is absolutely scandalous and cannot be repeated. Who will be held responsible?  
Fire Trails - these have been allowed to fall into disrepair. Why?  
Hazard Reduction - clearly this has not been effective over many years, based on the current the fuel load. A disaster waiting to repeat itself. Why?  
Infrastructure - most vulnerable when buildings are allowed to built too close to the bush. Why?  
Tallong RFS did their very best but they have limited resources and equipment. Why?

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### **1.3 Response to bushfires**

Warning - Tallong NSW 2579 received little attention as the Currowan fire swept north to the Shoalhaven Gorge  
Coordination - when responsibilities shifted to Picton in January the crisis in our area finally became fully understood. The RFS thoroughly surveyed the area and then marshalled resources to assist Tallong RFS  
Wingello and Bundanoon - we also received the appropriate attention when many houses in these villages were destroyed from a the fire - that emanated from the Shoalhaven Gorge  
Communication - limited to only one local Community Meeting. The Tallong facebook page was often not updated. The RFS website was basic by todays standards and was often inaccurate (For 48 hours it reported incorrectly that our property had been destroyed)  
Equipment - seemed inadequate for the scale, intensity and speed of this bushfire

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### **1.4 Any other matters**

We are now closer to the next bushfire season than the last one: changes are urgently needed in advance of October 2020

1) Preparation :

- The local RFS needs the appropriate recruitment, training and equipment
- Property Owners need to be counselled on what they need to do to prepare, including RFS visits on site

Strategy

- All Agencies, including National Parks, State Forests and RFS - need to collaborate on a Crisis Management Plan that is duly communicated to the Community

2) Land management

- Agencies need to URGENTLY roll out a state-wide hazard reduction program

3) Access

- Assessment needs to be undertaken to ensure the community can safely exit their properties. This is a particular issue at Tallong

Infrastructure

- An audit needs to be conducted to identify illegal properties and buildings not known to Council that drain RFS resources as they strive to save lives and buildings
- Building Approval guidelines need to be reviewed to ensure there is appropriate space between buildings and vegetation

4) Communication : needs to be overhauled at every level and

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professionally  
resourced

5) Equipment : needs major capital investment, both in the air  
and on the ground

6) Funding : the Emergency Services Levy (ESL) should be paid  
by ALL RATE PAYERS, not simply those who insure their  
properties

7) Personal Health : toxic bushfire smoke may well have long  
term effects; my wife and I are currently suffering inflammation as  
a direct consequence of these bushfires

The RFS did their best and the Community pulled together, but  
please do not under-estimate the wide and deep felt anger,  
frustration and despair that this was allowed to happen.

I do not see any evidence, yet, that harsh lessons have been  
learned and immediate action plans are being put in place - to  
ensure this does not happen again when the next bushfire  
season commences - in only twenty weeks time.

In my view the Community will simply not tolerate a repeat of the  
debacle and tragedy that was the 2019 /20 bushfire season

## **Supporting documents or images**

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